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FOR COMIC BOOK CONNOISSEURS

JANUARY, 1987 VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2 $2.95 (U.S.) $4.25 (CAN.)

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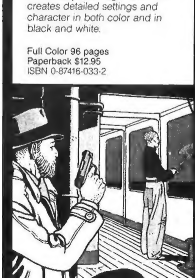

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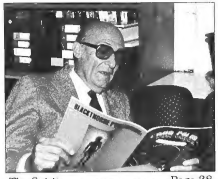

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point blank

Welcome to the second issue of **Four Color** Magazine. As I write this editorial, it is three days before Christmas and we are working late to put some final touches on our cover and news section.

Sometimes luck plays a hand in the success of a magazine. This issue we feel we've had our share, having had the opportunity to meet and interview one of the legends in the comic book field, Will Eisner. We had not planned an interview to accompany this issue's **Spirit** article, however jumped when we learned Will would be in our area. To fit the interview, we have postponed one article, "Do Comic Book Covers Make The Grade," to next issue.

We hope you enjoy the Eisner interview.

This issue's cover and centerfold was painted by Randy Elliott, our second cover artist. Randy lives in upstate New York where he works as an oil painter. We are pleased to present his work in the magazine. Randy is next scheduled to paint our fourth issue cover, on **ElfQuest.**

Rather than continue discussing the issue, I'd rather address something that seriously hurts the comic book industry (and is high on my annoyance list), publishers who fail to deliver their publications on time. And yes, by publications I do mean comics and magazines.

Right off the bat I'd like to state that when a publisher solicits for their comic or magazine, they **are** responsible to deliver it on time. What I am seeing more and more are publishers who solicit for their product before they are prepared to devote the time and effort to bring it out. This is certainly not healthy for the industry. Publishers must be willing to uphold their delivery date or they should not be dropping distributors, store owners and publications releases.

In November, the staff of Paragon Q visited Syracuse Litho Co. to watch the first copy of ***Four Color*** *roll off the press. From left to right are Joe Mingin of Syracuse Litho; Scott Williamson, Paul Haber, Brian Schlesinger and David Caruba of Paragon Q; Printers Jack Russell and Jim Freeman.*

Take a look at First Comics. When they say an issue of **Nexus** is going to arrive every 30 days, you can set your watch by it. Consequently, **Nexus** and First are well respected within the industry. It is a shame more publishers don't follow their example.

A major reason publishers fail to take the responsibility of delivering on time is because they do not see how their delay hurts others. Aside from damaging their reputation, late issues tie up store owners' and distributors' time and funds. Fans hate late titles and often will drop continually-delayed series. Even worse, they often hold the store owners responsible, costing them reputation and patronage.

Every two weeks **The Comics Buyer's Guide** runs a "hit" list of late publications in their "Comics In Your Future" section. The list, sadly, is far too long.

John Davis and Milton Griepp of Capital City Distribution recently circulated a letter to publishers reaffirming their "60-day provision." They said that January releases that arrive later than the end of February will have to be resolicited or offered as returnable. This is a positive step in resolving this problem. I hope other distributors will do likewise.

In next month's "Point Blank," I intend to continue discussing the publishers' responsibilities. I'd welcome feedback on the topic.

May I wish you a very happy New Year.

David Caruba
December, 1986

letters

Four Color welcomes and encourages letters from our readership. Letters stand a better chance at being chosen for this page if they are typed, double-spaced. However, we do select letters based on value to the readership. We regret, due to our monthly schedule, we are not able to answer letters personally.

Editing duties for this section are shared by the staff, who try and prefer to print letters in their entirety, when possible. A complete address cannot be printed unless the writer requests it to appear.

All letters should be addressed to **Four Color** Magazine, P.O. Box 1146, Maplewood, N.J. 07040.

Cheers For Bill

Brandon Smith
Hollister, CA 95023

To David,

I thoroughly enjoyed your first issue of **Four Color.** It had just a little more than I expected when I first saw it. All the articles were absolutely great. The Jon Muth and Dick Giordano interviews were great. I guess it was overall the best inside comics publication I've ever seen.

P.S. Can you tell me more about Bill Bradshaw and his art. The cover was spectacular.

Bill Bradshaw is a commercial artist in London. He primarily works for an advertising agency, overseeing storyboards and ad illustration. Bill is also a long-time comic book fan. FOUR COLOR approached him over a year ago about painting a cover for the first issue and he accepted. The Batman cover last issue was his first comics-related illustration. His next, featuring the character Wolverine, will be appearing next issue.

Continual Misspellings Hurt Magazine

Robert Greenberger
Associate Editor
DC Comics, Inc.
New York, NY 10103

Dear David,

I just wanted to drop you a note, congratulating you on your premiere issue. In a business where new publications are coming every minute, it takes something a bit special to be noticed. The design, layout and content of the first issue was a real pleasure. Sitting down and reading it was relaxing and enjoyable, giving me a new angle on the business (and how could I not be thrilled by the way my company got treated!).

I hope there is a market for yet another magazine on the business. With luck, the readers will find something fresh about your magazine and keep coming back. And, over time, you refine your presence so it can appeal to the broadest possible group without pandering to any market segment.

The biggest disappointment in the issue was the continual misspelling of creator names. For a magazine about the industry, it reflects poorly on you to get **that** many names wrong. For the record, the proper spellings are: Marc DeMatteis, Karen Berger, Neal Adams, Kevin Maguire, Siegle & Shuster and Cary Bates.

Best of luck with the future issues.

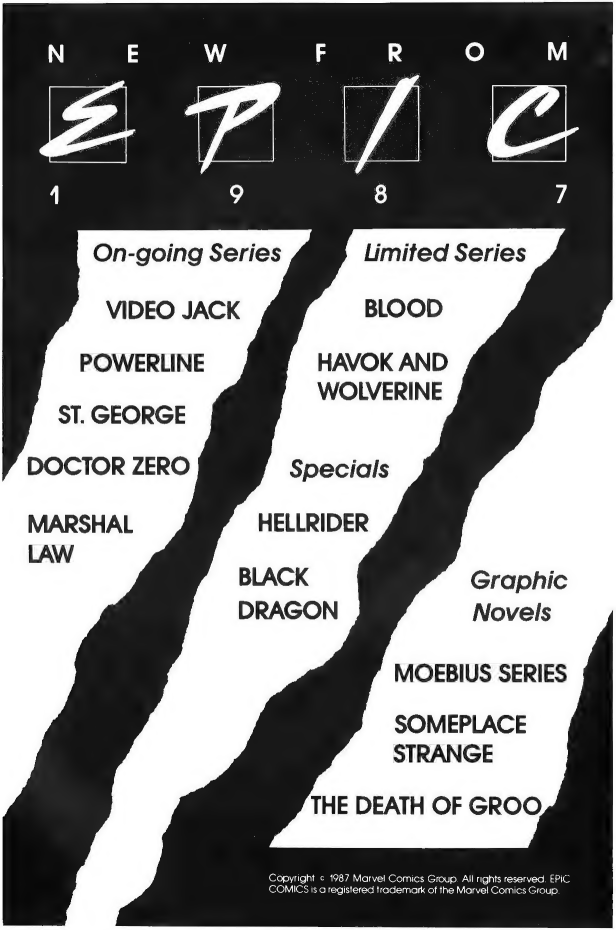
Thank you for your letter, Robert. As is true with any new magazine, there is always room for improvement. We regret the numerous spelling errors in our first issue and are working to improve the situation. We appreciate your support.

More Reviews Needed

Kent Johnson
San Francisco, CA 94102

David:

Got your first issue. Very nicely laid out–a beautiful magazine! HOWEVER, what's eventually going to decide whether I keep buying it or not is your **review column.** With all the titles flooding the market, we really need a substantial review magazine. The **Comics Journal** is published too infrequently and the reviews are too old to be of any use. **C.B.G.** is current and does a remarkable job, but their staff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and resources are just too small.

Your statement of intent at the beginning of the review page sounds great, especially the "open dialogue." But please, please **expand** this section. Six to ten pages would be nice. I want it to be worth buying your magazine just to get the reviews.

Also, cover repros are nice. It makes the issue under discussion much easier to remember and helps you find it on the stands.

Thanks for listening.

We are in the process of expanding the review section to six pages. By next issue we should reach our goal. During peak periods of flooding (March and April, for example, have umpteen new titles being launched), we may add extra pages to keep everyone up-to-date.

Full Color Eclipse

James Friel
Sales Manager
Eclipse Comics

Dear Folks,

It appears that your correspondent may have gotten the wrong idea about our future plans for black & white comics during our telephone interview last week. We are not converting a substantial portion of our line from color to black & white. Only two titles, ZOT! and CROSSFIRE, which were both previously published in color, will make the transition. We do not contemplate switching any other titles from color to black & white. While we are adding a number of titles to our black & white line, all the rest are either new ones (FUSION, THE DREAMERY, CALIFORNIA GIRLS), or titles previously published elsewhere (STIG'S INFERNO, REID FLEMING), and were always intended for black & white publication. A large majority of the comics we publish each month are and will continue to be full color titles. Several new color titles will be introduced this Spring and Summer, including AXA, THE LIBERTY PROJECT, and THE LOST PLANET. Look for more information soon on all of these.

Eclipse Comics believes strongly in the importance of presenting a varied and balanced line to the comics buying public. While our black & white titles are an important part of that line, we do not intend to allow them to constitute more than a minority of any given month's output.

We appreciate you clerifying Eclipse's plans concerning your black and white versus color line. FOUR COLOR regrets if our news article in any way gave readers the impression that Eclipse was converting to an entirely black and white line.

Issue Overview

Philip M. Botwinick
Woodhaven, NY 11421

Dear Editor:

I received the first issue of Four Color in the mail this week, and was impressed with the speed you sent it out. I have not seen the book in any of the shops I frequent in Manhattan or Queens at this date.

When I saw your ad in the **Comic Buyer's Guide** I grew very excited about this new publication. I am happy to report that the magazine is everything I expected and more.

From the layout of the book to the actual contents it is evident that you do care about comic books. I have looked for this type of temperament in a fanzine since the Comic Reader folded a few years ago. Even though I do read **Comics Journal** and **Amazing Heroes** I felt that both were the extremes of a swinging pendulum. The former is always much too critical of the hobby I have loved for 25 years, and there are times I put it down and wonder why I collect comics at all while the latter does not seem to get into the type of indepth interview of analysis your publication seems to suggest its direction will be.

Whoever came up with the idea to mix opinions with news must be complimented. The mixture makes the news seem less sterile than just reading what is happening. I wonder if your other readers will enjoy the way you mix a news item with personal opinions. I hope it will be a regular policy of the magazine.

I enjoyed all the articles published, especially the DC Renaissance article. Your interview stayed on the subject at hand without going off on many different directions. Although I am not exactly thrilled with how DC has been treating those of us who bought their

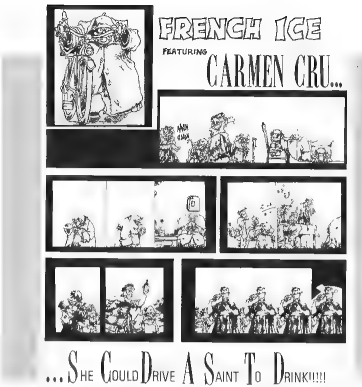
books during those years when the company did not produce "fan favorites" I respect the talents of the man. I missed Dick's first term as editor back in the sixties until the end of his employment, but when I did get those back issues I saw a man who was instilling excitement into a line of books that was in dire need of an overhaul.

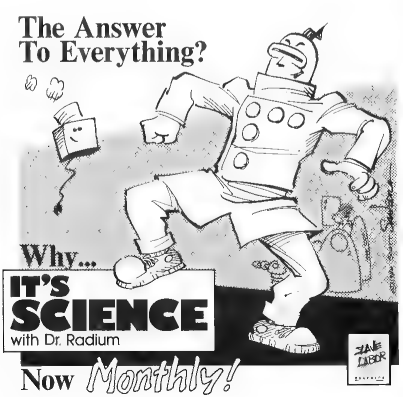
It is obvious that Dick has certain favorite characters such as the Charlton Heroes, but it appears that too much favoritism is being shown towards these characters. DC has many of its own characters who deserve another shot at having their own series if the Charlton characters rate theirs. Why should anyone think the Charlton characters will sell any better the second time around than the DC characters?

Dick was also mistaken about the death of the Kents in the origin of Superman. When the full uncut version appeared in **Superman #1**, 1939, there is definitely a panel with Clark standing over his parents' graves. I believe that this origin story was how it was supposed to look when Jerry and Joe presented it to the syndicates. I like Dick's memory is a bit selective in order to rationalize why the Kents are alive. I believe the story where Jonathan Kent is brought back to life was the testing ground for reader response to not having the Kents die. I myself feel that having Clark lose his parents made him a more sympathic character than the current version of Clark.

It also surprised me to read Dick's comments about Batman. If the Caped Crusader is a loner than why is he going to be a member of two super-teams at the same time. Last I heard Batman will be appearing in both the Justice League, and the Outsiders. For a character who is not into fraternizing he is sure being made to appear pretty sociable; the fact that Superman is not going to be a part of Justice League for 6 months is confusing since he is supposed to be the guy everybody likes to hang around with.

If DC had decided to go with the Englehart/Rogers version I could accept Batman being part of a group. When they previously did the series they really did go back to characters roots of the forties. That is the Batman I enjoy the most, he was a fun character to get involved with. Denny O'Neil makes him out to have too many psychological flaws that make





him too complex to just sit back and enjoy his adventures

I feel that the Barr stories are based on the scripts that appeared in the fifties. Barr has stated that he grew up on those stories and they are very special to him

Your article on **Crossfire** was appreciated as a new black and white book is to be released soon With all the coverage the character is getting I hope more people give the series a try. It was coincidental that all three prozines had an interview with Mark Evanier in the same month. Additionally **Crossfire** was the primary feature of the **Amazing Heroes** article this month.

Mark Evanier appears to be a man with a huge amount of integrity. I have always enjoyed his text pieces about Hollywood that appeared in Crossfire When the New Gods reprint series appeared it was Mark who finally shed some light on the first cancellation of the Fourth World Series. I had never known that Jack wanted to do the series as a limited series If you get a chance read the interview with Evanier in the current **Comics Journal.** You will get a full picture of just how bad a publisher Carmine Infantino was. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth at how bad Jack has been treated by the two largest comic companies. I guess it is no sur prise that whenever anyone at DC needed a villain larger than life they all want to use Darkseid.

In future issues of **Four Color** I would like to see interviews with Alan Gold, Ernie Colon, and Tony Isabella. The first two are, in my opinion, the best editors DC had since Dick Giordano's first period back in the sixties. Their views on the industry would make for an interesting article. An interview with Tony could be very controversial, as every time he starts a series, e.g. **Champions, Black Goliath, Hawkman,** something happens that causes him to leave a book. He is a very talented writer and I have always been disappointed in not ever seeing any of his ideas come to a satisfying conclusion by him.

Do you plan to run three features every issue or will it depend on the length of a particular story? Are interviews going to be the major feature each issue? I enjoy seeing articles on a professional doing the art in a book, this could be an artist or an inker

Although it may appear that interviews are the main feature each issue, the opposite is true. We do not intend to run interviews every month and will only schedule one when we feel it is important enough to take the place of a feature article. While Dick Giordano's interview was indeed planned for the first issue, we never expected to hear from, or meet, Will Eisner. When we had the chance, we jumped at the opportunity to interview him.

Regarding feature articles, we try and fit four per issue.

The mixing of news and opinion in our "N&O" section has drawn considerable feedback. To tell you the truth, on retrospect we were not entirely pleased with the mix. For this issue we have stripped the opinions from the section. However, we are going to add an opinion section, "As We See It," into "N&O," beginning next issue. In this section we will continue to run commentary on the news each issue.

One final point that we would like to clerify: We'd appreciate if you do not call Four Color **a "fanzine." We'd prefer if you'd simply refer to us as a magazine.**

We are in the process of expanding the review section to six pages. By next issue we should reach our goal. During peak periods of flooding (March and April, for example, have umpteen new titles being launched), we may add extra pages to keep everyone up to date.

Anti-Marvel Stance

John Malchiodi
New York, NY 10002

Gentlemen,

I occasionally pick up **Amazing Heroes** and other magazines of that type, but only when there's an article in it which interests me. I don't want or need to know all the upcoming comics for the next two months, I'd rather read a good critique or overview on a given title or artist. That's why when my eye caught your cover for issue #1, I was immediately drawn to it.

No, it wasn't the nice Batman painting or even your logo, rather it was the words ". . .For Comic Book Connoisseurs." Normally I don't go for hype but as I am a **fan** and not a collector (there **is** a difference), I decided to check you out. What did I find? I found a magazine of high production quality, intelligent writing and devoid of most of the usual inane propaganda

I read it cover to cover and enjoyed every article; something I consider a first.

The only complaint I have is your obviously anti-Marvel stance. Now don't get me wrong! I agree that **most** of Marvel's product is trash and too **X-Men** oriented, but to say this immediately does show some bias on your part, no?

We appreciate your letter, John, however we are not sure why you felt the magazine was "anti-Marvel." We are far from it, being a pro-industry magazine. In fact, our cover-feature next issue is on Marvel and how they uphold their copyrights.

Hard Times

Pierre Comtois
Lowell, MA 01850
Dear In Review People,

Liked your review section and your future plans for it except that it was too darn short! Anyway, a couple two cent's worth from me.

Mr. Cicala was right on target with his remarks regarding **Captain America.** It is a great book fallen on hard times since Lee left it as far as I'm concerned. And the reason is very simple: The writers writing it seem to be of liberal persuasions and thus, uncomfortable with an inherently conservative personality like the Captain The most recent manifestation of the problem is what Mr. Cicala mentioned, Cap's killing of a terrorist and the editor's consequent weak explanation that Captain America never killed anyone in his life! I beg to differ. There's no way Cap could have gone through World War II and all those battles for Shield in the sixties and not kill anybody. I mean, there are illustrations showing it in a score of comics, including Bucky mowing down the enemy with a tommy gun! Also, now, Cap fights for the American Dream not for America, as if the writers can't bring themselves to write about a character who fights for what America wants as well as what it believes in. As far as going back to the roots, this book would do well to go back to the Lee/Kirby issues to see how it's done.

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news and opinion

n&o

COMICO CLAIMS AD CENSORED BY C.B.G.

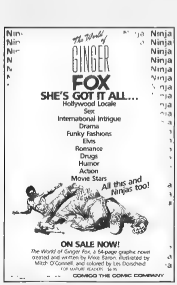
A question of censorship has arisen between two major comic-related publishers, Comico The Comic Company and Krause Publications, who produce the weekly newspaper, **The Comics Buyer's Guide**. The December 12, 1986 edition of **C.B.G.** contained a Comico ad for their **Ginger Fox** graphic novel, that prominently featured the words "Censored" two times.

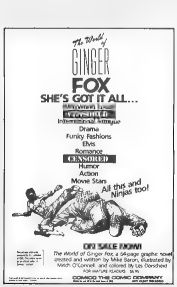
The full page advertisement also carried the following notice from Comico's Administrative Director, Bob Schreck: "This ad was arbitrarily censored by the publisher of **C.B.G.** This notice serves as an official notice of Comico's protest."

The advertisment in question featured two onental fighters engaged in combat. Stacked vertically above the fighters are eleven different phrases describing **The World of Ginger Fox**. **The Comics Buyer's Guide's** version of the ad did not feature the words "Sex" and "Drugs."

"What happened was, they [**The Comics Buyer's Guide**] cut out the ad and restacked the words. Ann Goetsch [**C.B.G.**'s Advertising Manager], noticed the ad had been altered. She called me on the phone and told me on the day of the deadline that my ad was edited."

According to Schreck, Ms. Goetsch did not edit the advertisement Schreck said Doug Watson, the publisher, edited it.





Comico's ***Ginger Fox*** *advertisement, right, as it appeared edited in* ***The Comics Buyer's Guide.*** *The original version, at left, features the words "Sex" and "Drugs."*

Schreck said Watson did not edit the advertisement until it reached Krause's typesetting department for some last-minute phoned-in additions by Schreck. "Mr. Watson then saw it and decided to change it."

According to Doug Watson, publisher of **The Comics Buyer's Guide**, his company reserves the right to edit any advertisement. He said this policy is clearly outlined in the newspaper's advertising kit. "Number eight on our 'Standard Advertising Policy' states, "All advertising is subject to the publisher's approval. The publisher reserves the right to reject advertising deemed not to be in keeping with the publication's standards and also reserves the right to edit advertising copy, to conform with standard advertising policy.'

"Our standard advertising policies have been in existence since 1952," Watson said.

Schreck said that Watson did not inform Comico of the changes in the ad. "Ann Goetsch had the decency to call me and say, 'Bob, your ad has been edited.'

At this point, after being notified of the editing, Schreck said he instructed Ms. Goetsch to replace the edited words with the word "Censored" in bold.

Schreck said he also instructed **C.B.G.** to include his disclaimer at the bottom of the edited ad. According to Schreck, **C.B.G.** also edited his disclaimer, removing his request for readers who object to the newspaper's actions to call Publisher Watson. "He didn't want any phone calls," said Schreck

Schreck pointed out that **The Comics Buyer's Guide** has carried advertisements in the past that featured partial nudity and text that included the two edited words. "I think it was very inconsistent with past advertising policies. Just a few months ago they ran an ad for Maurice Horn's **Sex In Comics** that had, as a border, half-

naked women. It is also rather interesting that the words 'Sex' and 'Drugs' can appear in bodies of type, editorials and letters."

Regarding Maurice Horn's **Sex In Comics** advertisement in **C.B.G.**, Watson said, "It is very hard for me or anyone in the building to check all ads. The advertising department certainly checks the addresses to make sure that's there. Sometimes an error is going to slip by and I'll be the first one to admit that there are ads that have gone into print that certainly haven't followed our advertising policy. But these are ones that have slipped through."

Watson said he has walked out on occasion to his typesetting department and seen **C.B.G.** ads that he felt were not suitable for publication. "When I see objectionable ads I'll go through and just cross them right out. I can't do that every day. It is not my job.

"I don't go in there and select certain advertisers because I don't like them. Far from it, because Comico is a good advertiser. We want them to continue advertising."

As far as editorial content goes, Watson said he leaves questions of taste entirely in the hands of co-editors Maggie and Don Thompson.

However, Watson said the readership of **The Comics Buyer's Guide** consists of a sizable number of minors, which helps explain the newspaper's advertising policies.

While it is likely Comico will continue to advertise in **The Comics Buyer's Guide**, Schreck summed up Comico's feelings on the incident by saying, "I feel it was arbitrary censorship."

QUEST CLASSICS COMING

Comico has announced a new Jonny Quest three issue mini-series coming in 1987. Entitled **Jonny Quest Classics**, the series will be illustrated by veteran artist Doug Wildey, the man responsible for setting the design and look of the original television series.

"The reaction we got from Doug's story in the first issue was ridiculous," said Administrative Director Bob Schreck. "People just kind of screamed at how good it was and how much fun they had reading it."

The series will be full-color adaptations of three of Wildey's favorite episodes from the original series. Each issue will feature 26 pages entirely produced by Wildey.

The first issue, slated for next summer, features a story entitled, "Shadow of the Condor." According to Schreck, the story evolves the Quest team having to ditch their plain over the Andes. They land on a mountaintop "where a retired Nazi war criminal is hanging out." The story culminates with Race Bannon in a dogfight with the aforementioned war criminal.

The other two stories include "Calcutta Adventure" and "The Werewolf of the Timberland." The first deals with the introduction of Haji to the Quest team, while "Werewolf" has the team going to Canada to crack a gold smuggling scam.

Schreck added that a possible backup feature to the mini-series would be an interview with Wildey himself. "It would recount what was going on in Doug's mind while he was doing the series," said Schreck. In particular, Schreck said the interview would focus in part on Hanna-Barbera's addition of Bandit to the cast for comic relief and how Wildey responded to the addition.

"We are very happy to be able to present such a package and are thrilled to be working with Mr. Wildey on this project," said Diana Schutz, editor in chief. "I'd say we're in for a real treat with this one!"

In other Jonny Quest-related news, issue seven of his ongoing series features art by Dan Spiegle. Still no decision on the regular art team to take over permanently with issue 12.

COMICO NOTES: Set in the far off future of fall 1987 is **Robotech In 3-D** a special one-shot inspired by the animated series. The 3-D comic will be be written by Markalan Joplin, pencilled by Mike Leeke and inked by Mike Chen. All presently serve as the creative team for **Robotech The Macross Saga**. Canadian artist Ken Steacy will contribute a wrap-around cover. Ray Zone will handle the special effects for the special...

The first issue of Comico's **Star Blazers** mini-series is set to soar in April, 1987. The four-issue series will contain new stories written by Phil **(Mythadventures)** Foglio, pencilled by Doug **(Dynamo Joe)** Rice and inked by Mike **(Robotech)** Chen. The new storyline is set several weeks after Prince Zordar and the Comet Empire forces were destroyed in the original series. "Favorite characters such as Captain Derek Wildstar, Nova and Dr. Sane will be prominately featured," said Schreck...

Comico has produced a color grid chart that displays the variety of color shades used in producing comics. The grid was printed by Sleepeck Printers of Illinois. According to Publisher Gerry Giovinco, the gird is the first chart to be produced by a comics publisher that accurately displays the 372 shades available to colorists. "The traditional flat-color system, that is still used in most comics today, consists of only 63 colors," said Giovinco. "Since Comico utilizes all 372 available shades, we felt it was important to provide accurate reference for our artists. Also instrumental in the production were Murphy Andersons numbers two and three of Visual Concepts...

STARLIN TO GIVE UP ART ON DREADSTAR

Jim Starlin announced that he plans on giving up the art chores on **Dreadstar**.

"I'm having trouble with the artwork these days," said Starlin. "I just can't keep up with the artwork any more. First and I are talking about geting somebody else to take over the art.

"I've laid out until issue 32 and I'm having a terrible time doing it. I'm kind of burning out on the artwork."

To date, Starlin has drawn every issue of **Dreadstar**, with the exception of #24, that was drawn by Jim Sherman. Starlin said he does not anticipate Sherman becoming the book's new regular penciler.

"I don't think Jim would want to," continued Starlin. "He's got quite a bit of commercial artwork he's storyboarding, stuff like that. He's liable to do fill-ins somewhere along the line, because he enjoyed the experience. But I don't see Jim doing a full-time book anyhow."

Starlin said he does not have a specific artist in mind to take over the pencilling chores of **Dreadstar**. "At this point, so many people are booked up that I don't have a set person yet." The new artist would most likely take over with issue #35. For issues #33 and #34, **Dreadstar** will have an as-yet-undertermined inker, to help ease the transition.

Starlin said he plans to remain on as writer of **Dreadstar**. He is in the process of wrapping up the Monarchy/Instrumentality War, that spanned the first 30 issues of the series and is prepared to take **Dreadstar** in a whole new direction.

"The next issue that's supposed to come out [#30], is the one with Vanth and the Lord Papal going at it for the final time." Starlin said that following that issue it is not likely that we will ever see the Lord Papal again.

"Issue #31 is sort of a conversation between Vanth and his power – the entire issue – and the aftermath of the war.

In issue #32, we start out the new storyline with Vance learning to adjust to a post-Monarchy/Instrumentality War civilization. Vance and his friends become policemen of sorts.

***Dreadstar** artist Jim Starlin takes a break from the drawing board.*

"The organization that's formed at this point – it's sort of like Dreadstar and Company officially – hunt down war criminals. That's their official function.

"Because the people who caused the problems (during the war) were paranormals like Dreadstar and Company, Dreadstar and Company find themselves not at all popular, even after all the things they've done in this galaxy.

"But they're still allowed to function because the galaxy can't get along without their types." Starlin said that most of the villains hunted down by Dreadstar and his band will be new, since, "I've killed off almost everybody we've got. At the end of the war, the only survivors, as far as villains, are Gecko Lingus, and Infra Red – but I don't know what's happened to him. Ultra Violet's become part of the group. It's a whole new group."

Among the new members of Dreadstar's group are Tuetun, the lumbering behemoth who appeared twice before in the series as a villain. Iron Angle, who "was used in scientifici experiments by the Instrumentality during the war," will also join. Finally, Fix, who Starlin described as "a bad-ass mechanic," will become

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involved.

Dreadstar will become a little less invincible in the near future. "I'm chopping a few of his powers off," Starlin continued. "He won't fly any more and he won't have the 'power fist' any more."

Starlin said he mostly plans on sticking with his new direction of Vanth hunting down war criminals in the foreseeable future. "I've got some nice stories set up for it." He added that he has the book plotted out for quite a ways.

Though he is giving up the art on **Dreadstar**, Starlin maintained that he has no plans to stop writing the book. "I've [still] got quite a bit on that to do."

Starlin concluded that while he is still concentrating on chronicling the exploits of Dreadstar and Company, he doesn't see himself writing comics permanently. "I'm trying to get myself over to doing novels full time," he said.

— Barry Dutter

BALLANTINE TO PUBLISH FIRST

First Comics has announced an important agreement with Ballantine Publishing to bring more exposure to their line of titles. Beginning in Fall, 1987, Ballantine Publishing will begin releasing under their own imprint, early editions of First Comics in a trade paperback form. These paperbacks will be available in bookstores nationwide.

First Publisher Rick Obadiah, who refers to these anthologies as graphic novels, added, "Some of these books may be in hard cover but they would all definitely be in cardboard covers.

"The first book that will be produced is a collection of the first six issues of **Jon Sable Freelance**. Obviously, **Sable** is our longest running book and one of our strongest selling books. This is primarily why **Jon Sable** is the first one they are going to launch."

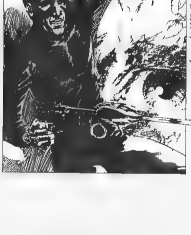
Aside from the first two issues that served as an introduction to the character, the trade paperback will include issues three through six that were a four-part origin story.

Obadiah said that these early issues of Mike Grell's comic have by now completely sold out.

"The books will also be offered either through First Comics or through the Ballantine sales force to the direct market. The direct market, as we have always done, will be getting the books prior to the book stores receiving them."

The editor on the project for Ballantine is Ed Walters.

OPINION: These paperbacks sound like an excellent way to bring some classic stories to a larger audience. Ultimately, this will benefit the industry in several directions. Comic book readers who have not had the chance to read early First titles will now be able to do so and now in a better package. The paperback editions will also hopefully introduce new readers to the medium **FOUR COLOR** commends First on this project.



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THE RETURN OF MR. X:

Mister X, the cult series created by Dean Motter and visualized by the Hernandez brothers, Jaime, Gilbert and Mario of **Love and Rockets** fame will be available in a deluxe hardcover edition from Graphitti Designs. Shipping the middle of January, the 116 page full color book combines the Hernandez brothers' stories that were originally published by Vortex as well as "Tales of Somnopolis," a feature exclusive to the Graphitti Designs edition.

The book features a new Jaime Hernandez illustration for the signature page and will be limited to 1,500 copies. **The Return of Mr. X** carries a retail price of $34.95.

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U.N.C.L.E. RETURNS TO COMIC FORM

A new company, Entertainment Publishing of Worcester, Ma., has announced **The Man From U.N.C.L.E.** as its flagship title. The monthly black and white comic, priced at $1.50, will hit stands in January. Titles to come include include **Shadow Blade**, described as a highly realistic comic about a blind ninja, written by Stan Timmonr and drawn by Ken Penders, and **Forever Now**, drawn by Dan Courtney and written by Chris Coleman. **Forever Now** concerns the exploits of a group of people transported to the present from past eras. Another title, **Delta Tenn**, is about a female police officer fighting crime in the future. Most of these will appear the last week in January.

The **U.N.C.L.E.** idea apparently came to Paul Howley, company president

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and his associate, David M. Lynch, clear out of the blue. They did the logical thing and called MGM studios in Culver City, who referred them to the New York office. According to Howley, there was very little difficulty in securing the rights. MGM's biggest reaction was surprise. "They thought it was dead, for all intents and purposes," said Howley. "MGM couldn't believe anyone would want to market an U.N.C.L.E. product 18 years after the series left the air."

Eventually, Lois Sloane, MGM's director of licensing requested a proposal and Howley supplied her with about three pages of preliminary artwork. So sure were they of MGM's compliance that Howley and crew started work before the contract had been delivered. As part of their deal, Howley's artists are restricted to using the likenesses of **U.N.C.L.E.** stars Robert Vaughn, David McCallum and Leo G. Carroll only. Also, MGM has approval on each and every comic printed, the main reason being to make sure the stories do not misrepresent a highly lucrative syndication property.

The Man From U.N.C.L.E. was not always so profitable, however. After a phenomenally successful first run on NBC-TV from 1964 to 1968, the series became one of the top American syndication properties and remained so for several years, until **U.N.C.L.E.** came under attack by the PTA and other groups for its violence (tame stuff nowadays). As a result, the series virtually disappeared and, at one point, MGM actually shelved the 105 episodes since the meager syndication profits could not equal the amount of residuals that had to be paid to the actors each time the series was exhibited. In 1984, barely two stations in the country ran **U.N.C.L.E.** Then, in September of 1985, the CBN national cable satellite network picked up the series and **U.N.C.L.E.** was suddenly hot again. **The Man From U.N.C.L.E.** comic book will, hopefully, ride on this new found success and in fact MGM itself has been promoting the comic as an adjunct to its syndication.

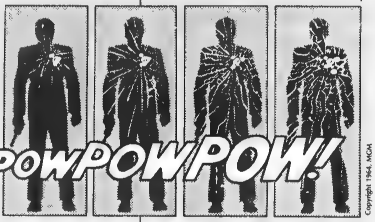
And how has **U.N.C.L.E.** changed in eighteen years? Not one iota. Howly said the comic picks the characters and premise out of the '60s and deposits them in the 1980s unchanged. There will be a few new running characters, but that's all. In addition, the comic pretends that the 1983 CBS TV movie, **The Return of the Man From U.N.C.L.E.** never happened, which will be just fine by the majority of fans. "The primary goal of the creative team," Howley said, "is to do justice to the familiar aspects of the original [program]. The general tone of the comic book will lean toward that of the show's first season episodes."

The **U.N.C.L.E.** comic book will be 24 pages long. The first issue, written by David M. Lynch and Skip Simpson and drawn by Ken Penders, is titled "The Number One With A Bullet Affair." The story has Thrush putting coded messages on compact laser discs that can only be picked up by a boy with braces. Howley has gotten excellent responses so far, particularly from Bud Plant Distributors who lauded Pender's artwork.

One of the slogans for the new comic is, "Just when you needed them most!" But will readers even remember, let alone need them? Howly said, "This is one of those classic shows people of my generation, in their early 30s, remember fondly. Old fans will definitely be among the readers, but you do not have to remember **U.N.C.L.E.** or know anything about it to enjoy this comic. Above all else, it's an intelligent, extremely imaginative property and that has universal appeal."

Channel D Out.

– Glenn A. Magee



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ENGLEHART ON FANTASTIC FOUR

Steve Engelhart will be dropping one title that he writes, **Justice**, and picking up the **Fantastic Four**. Engelhart will be taking the **F.F.** reins from Roger Stern, who has plotted the book up until issue #302.

"Roy Thomas is going to do a fill-in

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Highlights Include . . .

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- **Compatible with Heroes Unlimited® and the Mechanoids.**
- **Dozens of characters, villains and heroes.**
- **Several adventure scenarios and scenario ideas.**
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Highlights Include . . .

- **A specially commissioned all NEW ten page Ninja Turtles comic strip by Eastman and Laird.**
- **The return of the *Terror Bears* and *Doc. Feral*.**
- **Five Adventure Scenarios.**
- **Compatible with Heroes Unlimited.®**
- **ALL artwork by Eastman & Laird!**
- **$6.95 (post paid) — 48 Pages**

with #303," said Englehart, "and then I'm picking it up as a regular writer with #304.

"It will still be John Buscema on pencils. There's talk, and I think this is going to work out, that Joe Sinnot would come back for the inks." He said current inker Sal Buscema would go someplace not yet determined.

Englehart said, because he is still fairly new to the series, he has not yet developed any long-range plans.

"Basically, somebody kidnaps Franklin, because they need Franklin's particular powers. They have a much better idea of what those powers are than Reed does, ever after all this time.

"When that's over, Reed and Sue decide their first priority is their son, rather than the Fantastic Four." He said the decision comes from the trauma Franklin has recently been through in the **F.F.** and **Power Pack**.

"Reed and Sue decide they're basically going to go on semi-retirement from the F.F. but they will still be around when needed. I'm not going to write them entirely out of the book." He said he intends to tie the situation with Franklin into **Power Pack**.

Englehart said Reed and Sue go to Ben and invite him to become the leader of the new Fantastic Four. Jonny Storm, of course, will still be the fourth member of the team.

"Ben, as we will discover, despite his gallant attempt to take this whole Johnny/Alicia thing in stride . . it's not real easy for him to go from being lover to friend. And that has to do with the people he picks."

He first picks Ms. Marvel, who he wanted to start a relationship with in the **Thing** book before it got cancelled. Englehart said she looks like the woman he was in love with on the planet of the Secret Wars. "Basically, he wants a girlfriend and he picks her.

"The second person he picks, needed to fill the other slot on the team, is Crystal. She, among other things, is an old member of the Fantastic Four who needs to rehabilitate her life after the mess she made of it in **The Vision & The Scarlet Witch** [limited] series. Just incidentally, this will make Johnny Storm feel very uncomfortable."

Englehart said the new members will change the dynamics of the team. He said it is very clear that Ben is not really able to just kiss off Johnny and Alicia after all this time. "Unfortunately for Ben, Johnny and Alicia are entirely in love. They are going to be going about the business of setting up housekeeping in New York City.

"And I'd just like to add, without getting too specific, that I've got a pretty decent line-up of big-time villains in mind for the first couple of issues." Among those will be the ultimate F.F. foe, Dr. Doom. "Definitely Doom, and Doom Fairly early on."

Englehart said that he would like to wrap up plot threads from the recently-cancelled **Powerman/Iron Fist** series. "When the **Power/Fist** book was cancelled, I know Jim Owsley had an idea of some future stuff he wanted to do with Cage and the Falcon. Now that Owsley is no longer working with Marvel, I don't know if anybody else has picked up that idea. But if it's available, or if any part of it is available, I think I might try to have the F.F. solve Luke Cage's problems or at least pursue them. He **was** a member of the team."

Englehart's acquisition of the **Fantastic Four** means giving up some of his other regular assignments, in this case, the New Universe title **Justice**. "**Justice**, I unfortunately have to drop, after issue #7. Issue #6 is a fill-in by Geoff Isherwood, that he wrote and drew. Issue #7 will be my last writing job, with Geoff drawing."

Englehart said he plans a long future with the **Fantastic Four**. "If you're a Marvel writer, the **F.F.** is something you want to write."

He said he passed up the opportunity to write the title 15 years ago because he wanted to continue writing the **Hulk**.

– Barry Dutter

RENEGADE ANNOUNCES MAJOR EXPANSION

Renegade Press, that started operation three years ago with barely five titles, is planning a major expansion, with several new comics ready to appear over the next few months, totaling 20 in all by July. The company's best-selling titles now include **Ms. Tree**, **The Cases of Sherlock Holmes** and **Silent Invasion**. Two of its smaller, more esoteric titles are ceasing publication. **Flaming Carrot** will appear under a new banner sometime next year when writer/artist Bob Burden leaves to form his own company. **Neil The Horse** is also departing

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Renegade. Details were not available as to when and where it would resume publication, if at all.

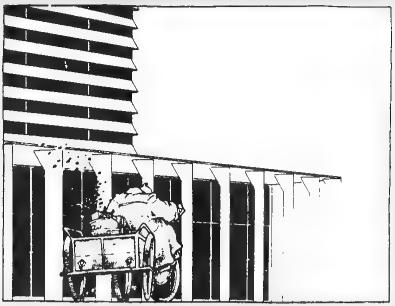
Of the new titles, **Open Season**, a three issue mini-series, started its run in December. Written and drawn by Jim Bricker, Renegade describes **Open Season** as "a humorous, socio-political look at relationships." **Valentino Too**, the next installment in the semi-autobiographic series by Valentino, is also scheduled

Titles appearing sometime between January and July of 1987 include **Holiday Out** (written by Michael Vance and drawn by Wayne Truman), that Renegade's Wendi Lee described as revolving around "a hotel nestled between fantasy and reality." **Shadows From The Grave** is a two-issue horror anthology written by Kevin McConnell and drawn by Dan and David Day. **Amusing Stories**, written and drawn by Scott Shaw and Don Dougherty is a humorous collection of tales that will occasionally feature the exploits of an anthropomorphic ape know as "Urban Gorilla." Also appearing under the Renegade label will be **Wimmen's Comix**, an anthology series by prominent women cartoonists (including Trina Robbins, Dori Seda and Aline Kominsky) scheduled for publication twice yearly.

With **French Ice**, Renegade will be taking on an international flavor. This series, set to debut in late March with a cover price of $2.00, is an American adaptation of the phenomenally popular French comic "Carmen Cru," that appeared in the humor magazine **Fluide Glacial**. Randy and Jean-Marc L'Officier translate and Diane Valentino handles the lettering. The original artist and writer, Lelonge, is working on his first English edition of "Carmen Cru." The main character, incidentally, is a vitriolic old woman who lives like a hermit in the middle of Paris Although the French version sold an unprecedented 100,00 copies, Renegade doesn't expect to be able to reproduce that phenomenon in the U.S., although initial response has been excellent, according to Ms. Lee.

Ms. Lee also announced the addition of four other titles: **Love Fantasy**, **Renegade Romance**, **Friends** and **Roscoe The Dog**.

— Glenn A. Magee



American audiences are about to get their first exposure to the popular French humor strip ***Carmen Cru,*** *courtesy of Renegade Press. Featured above and below is the star of the series, an old woman who lives like a hermit in Paris.*

ECLIPSE TO UNLEASH AXA

In March, Eclipse Comics will begin publication of **Axa**, a new version of the popular British newpaper strip about the adventures of a female warrior in a post-nuclear-holocaust world of domed zombie cities, mutant motorcycle gangs and general mayhem. **Axa** is not a completely new title for Eclipse or the United States. Ken Pierce Books published a black and white anthology of the newspaper strips some time ago and a full color graphic novel, distributed by Eclipse.

Impressive sales figures on the books led Pierce to approach the company with an idea for a comic book on **Axa**, to which he owns the American rights. The major difference between the British and American **Axa's** will be in terms of costume. It seems that in the U.K., Axa romped through the Forbidden Zone topless, which was fine for the more liberal European comic-reading public but not for the U.S. where comic books, particularly those published by Eclipse, have been under attack recently for their "adult themes."

Axa's writer will be Chuck Dixon, of **Airboy** fame. Eclipse's Sales Manager Jim Friel reports that the American version will probably not be using any of the original British storylines, that have already received enough exposure through Ken Pierce's books.

VALOR THUNDERSTAR AND HIS FIREFLIES!

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Edited by Brian Augustyn

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Issue one cover by Jerry Ordway

Don't Miss This One.

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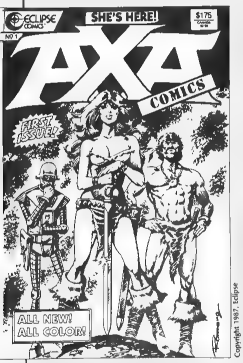
Artist on the series will be Enrique Badia-Romero, who co-created and worked on **Axa**. The title will retail for $1.75.

ECLIPSE NOTES: **Fusion** #1 that Friel describes as "space opera done right," will appear in January. Steve Barnes is writing. Lela Dowling and Steve Gallacci are the artists. . . .

Espers, formerly a mini-series, has now gone bi-monthly. Written by James D. Hudnall, it concerns the exploits of a group of men and women with unearthly powers. British artist David Lloyd, who worked on "V For Vendetta" in **Warrior**, is currently drawing **Espers**, but starting with #5, John Burns will take over. Burns has worked on **Modesty Blaise**.

– Glenn A. Magee



ECLIPSE TO PUBLISH JAPANESE SERIES

Eclipse Editor In Chief Catherine Yronwode announced her company would be publishing three black and white Japanese series that have been translated into English. Originally published by Shogakukan, each series will be released as bi-weeklies in the U.S. Yronwode noted that the series were published originally in black and white.

Swinging into action for Eclipse and honor is ***Kamui, The Ninja.*** *The bi-weekly series reprints the number one selling Japanese ninja series.*

The first series is **Kamui, The Ninja** by Sampei Shirato, "the number one-selling ninja series in Japan," said Yronwode. "It has been running for many years and is extremely popular. It is considered in Japan to be a comic that deals with adult themes. It is not a juvenile ninja comic." The series is set in sixteenth century Japan.

Area 88 is the second series. Yronwode describes the title as being a science fiction/action fighter pilot comic. "It concerns a team of fighter pilots who are battling in a fictionalized version of the Middle East, in North Africa, called Area 88. Both story and art on this series are by Kaoru Shintani.

The third book is **Mai, The Psychic Girl**. "This has extremely beautiful art. It is about a girl who has ESP-like powers and is hunted by a band of psychics with political and occult goals." The story is by Kazuya Kudo and the art by Ryoichi Ikegami.

Yronwode said that because the page-count of the original stories varied, the page count of the Eclipse versions will vary as well. "We will simply throw in the extra pages. In some cases there may be a 40 page issue instead of 32 pages and we won't charge extra."

These in addition to the bi-weekly **Airboy** will allow Eclipse to release two bi-weekly series each week.

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Will comics become a literary art form?

CATCH THE SPIRIT

An interview with

WILL EISNER

Will Eisner is a legend in the comic book industry. The creator of **The Spirit,** he could easily be satisfied with this single contribution to the four color medium. Will Eisner is far from it. A passionate creator dedicated to broadening the comic book field to appeal to a larger older audience, Eisner is constantly at work, illustrating new novellas and planning new graphic novels. At 70, Eisner has no intention of slowing down and claims his numerical age is the result of a computer error.

Eisner is an **artist** in every sense of the word. He has the ability of capturing reality and the people he meets on paper. He is a consummate observer of the human condition, able to identify the finest elements of life and reproduce them in his work.

For generations of artists, Eisner is a teacher. Once a week Eisner lectures and critiques young, aspiring comic book illustrators, often spending considerable time showing them how to design and maintain a reader's interest from one page to another.

Copyright 1987, Will Eisner

"Gradually, as Ebony appeared, I began to develop a consciousness of what I was dealing with here. I suddenly realized that I had not just a minstrel comedian on my hands but something more. I had a human being."

FOUR COLOR caught up with him in between classes at The New York School of Visual Art.

FOUR COLOR: What was the comic book scene like in 1940?

EISNER: 1940 was actually about six years after the comic book as we know it today made its appearance as a medium. The scene then was almost like the early days of movies. New publishers were coming into the business. Pulp magazines were dying as a medium. People like Street and Smith and Popular Publications who were big publishers, were beginning to drop pulps, one right after the other. New comic book publishers were appearing almost out of the woodwork.

Those days, with a few hundred dollars in credit, you could be in the publishing business almost overnight. This was because new distributors were being formed. At that time American News Company was beginning to lose its great power and independent news companies started. People like Al Harvey, who formed Harvey Comics, were being supported by new distributors coming into the field. It was kind of a free-for-all.

1940 was also a time in which the comics had really arrived.

Superman had appeared and the whole genre of what they called in those days a "costumed character" — now called super heroes — had made its impact.

FOUR COLOR: When Everett Arnold approached you to create a newspaper comic book, what did you have in mind in terms of format and character?

EISNER: Nothing. He was very friendly with the Register Tribune Syndicate and he called me one day, with Henry Martin [the Tribune's syndicate representative], over for a talk. I was still running Eisner and Igor Studios at the time. They asked me to join them, if I would. What they had in mind was to produce a comic book for newspapers. That's all they had in mind. They had no other basic idea.

I didn't have The Spirit at that time. I wasn't running around with a character looking for a sale. The reason Arnold offered me the opportunity was because by then he had been publishing comic books himself. He was originally a printing press salesman and got to know the comic book market because newspaper presses were used to produce comic books.

The reason they selected me, unfortunately, was not because I was a great genius or brilliant artist but because of the fact that I was able to deliver. This was very critical to newspaper men.

FOUR COLOR: So Arnold made no actual demands on your character?

EISNER: No, not at that point.

FOUR COLOR: Did he later on?

EISNER: He said later, "What do you have in mind?" I told him I was going to do a detective story. He said, "We'd like to have a costumed character." Apparently in the mind of Henry Martin and Arnold, a costume character was most representative of a comic book. Remember, they were trying to supply to the newspapers, something the newspapers had a felt need for. This was to compete with comic books to whom they felt they were losing Sunday circulation.

I made The Spirit wear a mask and gloves as an accommodation. I didn't really want to do a costumed character.

FOUR COLOR: We know Arnold approached Walter Gibson for his **Shadow** character before approaching you. Did Arnold in any way suggest that you should include Shadow-esque elements in **The Spirit**?

EISNER: No. I didn't know he had asked Gibson for **The Shadow**. That was certainly not told to me.

FOUR COLOR: How did you conceive **The Spirit** both in terms of character and series?

EISNER: My conception for The Spirit stemmed from my concept of what I was working toward. Remember, I was leaving the comic book world. The comic book audience at that time was reasoned to be composed of an audience consisting mostly of 10-year-old cretins from Kansas City. I wanted to get out of that medium. I always took my work and myself seriously. I always felt I was dealing with a literary form. I felt it from the earliest days in this field. I was not always able to articulate it the way I have been as I get older but I felt it and knew it then.

I really wanted to write and work for an adult audience. The newspapers gave me the opportunity because the Sunday paper addressed itself to everybody.

I conceived it also as doing something that had never been done before. It was the first time complete comic book stories were produced every week in the newspaper. Comics had always been con-

Copyright 1987, Will Eisner

tinuities in the daily newspapers. The story concepts would be for every six weeks with the story ending and flowing into another.

So, those two awarenesses were there for me to begin with. It gave me then the opportunity to produce a short story a week. That's where I really conceived it. I was not interested in creating a great, marketable, patentable character in the sense of Superman or Batman.

FOUR COLOR: You've mentioned both The Spirit's gloves and mask. On retrospect, looking back at them today, are you pleased?

EISNER: I was never pleased with them. They were always in my way. A large part of the humanity of The Spirit came from the fact that I was constantly having him struggle. The Spirit was always trying to get out from under that mask. The whole idea was utterly ridiculous, even in hindsight. A man walking down the street or into a subway with a mask and nobody screaming or arresting him for mental incompetence is ridiculous. I was always looking for believability in my stories. That's the key to understanding my work.

FOUR COLOR: If you were given free rein on **The Spirit**, aside from the mask and costume, what else would you change?

EISNER: Those are the only two elements.

FOUR COLOR: When The Spirit first met Ebony, he was a taxi driver, however through the years he seemed to take on the role of a young child. Why the change in his age?

EISNER: In the first issues of **The Spirit**, Ebony was a device. Remember, that in every year, even today, there are humor cliches. Humor stems from the cultural position in any given era. There was a time in this country where anyone foreign, whether he was Italian, Irish or Polish, was, per se, funny. Humor was extracted from those things. So in those days I followed the natural inclination as anyone who writes humor.

Gradually, as Ebony appeared, I began to develop a consciousness of what I was dealing with here. I suddenly realized that I had not just a minstrel comedian on my hands, but something more. I had a human being. Ebony began taking on the characteristics of a human. So I reduced his age as soon as I could, around the second or third issue.

I reduced his age so he would become more viable and less offensive in a stereotypical fashion.

I was never conscious of the fact I was dealing in bigotry. I didn't feel I was involved in any sort of a racial problem because I was dealing in the humor as it was in the day. I make no apologies for it. I don't feel sorry for what I did. I did it the best way I knew how.

FOUR COLOR: So, looking back on Ebony, you are satisfied? You don't consider recent criticism to be valid?

EISNER: No. As a matter of fact I had been through this while the strip was in progress. Classic story was one day I got a letter from a fellow who had gone to school with me and was now with a large union in charge of cultural affairs. He wrote me this scathing letter reminding me that I had been "liberal" while I had been in school with him. Like all kids in the depression you were always part of some political movement to change the world. He asked, how could I have betrayed my conscience by doing this and that.

At the same time I got a letter from Baltimore's **Afro-American,** the major black newspaper. It was a very complimentary letter. In fact, I think I received it on the same day or within a day of each other. The letter said I was handling this with great conscience. If I remember the letter correctly it said, "In times like these when colored people are trying to emerge into sunlight, you are helping by treating this character realistically with kindness and care."

You'll learn after a while that in any writing field there are usually three sides to everything -- yours, theirs and the real side. It is very difficult to read your fan mail!

FOUR COLOR: When Sammy came into the strip, was he a different interpretation of Ebony? To phrase it differently, was Sammy, in effect, a white Ebony?

EISNER: I guess, yes. Later on I began to pick on less defendable minorities. What I was looking for was a foil. One of the things that apparently appears in my work and betrays my feeling is that I have an innate restlessness. What I create today is done as far as I'm concerned. Tomorrow I'm looking for something new. Having exhausted everything I wanted to say about Ebony I decided it was time to move on. I considered doing a complete story about Ebony at the time. If I had the publishing opportunity at the time I probably would

"Before the war, The Spirit stories I did were highly imaginative, very introspective and fantasy-oriented. When I came out, as the man said, I had seen the elephant and talked to the owl. I had my own life experience and I began to apply it to what I was doing."

have put out a whole book on Ebony by himself.

By the time the '50s rolled around, I had been through the war. I had seen things that changed a lot of my philosophical thinking. When I got into the army there were segregated ranks. There were black divisions and white divisions. That bothered me. I began to realize that something was rotten here in Denmark. When I got out, the civil rights movement was beginning in earnest. I realized, then, that I was unable as a white man to do a black character with any fair expectation of acceptability. No matter how sensitive and honest I was about the writing of it, I would be nothing more than an Amos and Andy if I continued. Those were one of the things that impelled me to do that [bring in Sammy], plus the fact I was looking around for another application of the same idea. I was just looking for novelty.

Remember, turning out a story a week chews up an awful lot of ideas. After a while you reach the bottom of the barrel!

FOUR COLOR: How did the war change **The Spirit**?

EISNER: It changed **The Spirit** the way it changed me. Before the war, **The Spirit** stories I did were highly imaginative, very introspective and fantasy-oriented. When I came out, as the man said, I had seen the elephant and talked to the owl. I had my own life experience and I began to apply it to what I was doing. I was dealing with more realism after the war than I had dealt with before.

There are some people who have reviewed my work and like the pre-war **Spirit** stories better than the post-war **Spirit** stories, largely because they felt they were more abstract.

When I got out, I began dealing with real life. I had become aware of real life. The army, as it did with other people, brought me face to face with real living. So **The Spirit** after the war represents me. The thing I want to say about **The Spirit** is that I am aware of the fact that there is a great deal more of me in **The Spirit**, personally, than there is with people working on things like **Batman** and **Superman**. No one thinks of taking a character like that and inserting a part of yourself into it. **The Spirit** was essentially a series of short stories that happened to have a heroic character in it.

FOUR COLOR: During the post-war **Spirit**s, children began playing a far more prominent role. Often you alluded to children who were abused, with The Spirit always coming to their side. Was the use of children a personal response to the war and if so, why?

EISNER: No, it was not a response to the war. It was a response to my early literary nutrition that consisted heavily of Horatio Alger, O. Henry and all the 1930s short story writers who frequently dealt with the human condition in terms of helplessness, within the body of the establishment. When you're with stories in a visual medium, you are left with little room for abstract subtleties. You have to deal with imagery that can deliver instant response and sympathy. There is nothing more sym-

"As far as Will Eisner and The Spirit after the war, remember I was dealing with realism and my perception of realism based on my own experiences. I began to feel free enough and had courage enough to introduce my own thinking."

pathetic than a little orphan because everybody relates to an orphan. There is nothing more emotion-evoking than a crippled person, whether he's blind or whether his legs are missing.

If you don't believe that, look at the guys who are raising funds using pictures of polio kids.

It might have been a cheap shot in a way, but I don't think so. I was looking to evoke real emotion, real sympathy, within a medium that was, up to then, dealing superficially and addressing itself to youngsters with very little life experience.

FOUR COLOR: Also after the war the series seemed to become far more sexually charged with femme fatales. Why?

EISNER: I don't think it became more sexually charged. Everybody working in adventure stories, and that includes the old pulp writers as well as comic writers, are in the process of constantly dealing with sex. Sex is a very important part of our lives and relationships between men and women is something that everyone is constantly dealing with, whether they explore it or not.

These relationships change. During the '60s, the relationship was altered as women began to find themselves. The man/woman relationship altered slightly. These have an effect on all of us.

As far as Will Eisner and **The Spirit** after the war, remember I was dealing with realism and my perception of realism based on my own experiences. I began to feel free enough and had courage enough to introduce my own thinking. My own thinking, my own tastes, were always very much in favor of the competent woman. I wasn't being a women's liberationist. Although I'm credited with the fact that women in my work anticipated the women's liberation movement, I know for a fact that I was following nothing more than my own basic man/woman bias.

My own sexual bias has always been, not as much of a sexual attraction to the helpless woman. I was not as attracted, even as a young man, to the dumb-but-pretty girl. I was more interested in the girl who was not quite as pretty but was more attractive. I always found it a greater challenge – to seduce the dutchess as a writer once said is far more exciting than to seduce the simple, little peasant girl.

FOUR COLOR: **The Spirit** is as realistic and exciting today as it was four decades ago. Why is this? What elements of **The Spirit** do you feel make it timeless?

EISNER: That's a little like asking Einstein why he's a great genius! I've often thought about that because I'm really as amazed as anyone else that **The Spirit** has survived even after 36 years of entombment. The only way I can explain it, by stepping back, is that I was apparently dealing with fundamental subjects. This is very characteristic of everything I've done. I've always been concerned in my storytelling and my writing with fundamental plots.

I suspect those basic, fundamental plots will survive long after I'm gone. They'll be here always. I think that accounts for the survival of the Sherlock Holmes stories over the years, even though they take place in a time and element long since gone.

I'm most grateful for it. I never cease to be a little amazed and a little in awe that a 14 or 15-year-old kid will write me and say, "I just picked up **The Spirit** for the very first time and find it very interesting." After which he asks for a genuine, original drawing!

FOUR COLOR: Have you considered doing a final, definitive **Spirit** story that might somehow put the character to rest? Or, do you feel a story you've done already is the definitive story?

Face to face, creator and creation have an eye to-eye talk. Eisner, for the record, is the gentleman on the left, sans face mask.

EISNER: The answer to part one of that question is that I've thought about it from time to time and when I think about it I lie down until the feeling goes away. The second part of that answer is that I don't think I've done a definitive story.

Now, let me go back up and answer both questions overall. The question always comes up about doing **The Spirit** once more or going back and doing more **Spirit** stories. I have a problem. I'm in a mortal struggle with time and I think I'm losing. Time is a very precious commodity to me. I've always got more projects on hand than I've got time to do them. I must satisfy my lifetime need which is to take this medium where I think it should go and to do better things than I've done before.

So I'm sitting there and I have a graphic novel that I'd like to do, or a textbook, or something else. And someone comes along and says, "How about doing **The Spirit** again?" I ask him why. There are only two reasons why I would do **The Spirit** once again. One would be to satisfy an inner need to do it and the other reason would be to satisfy idle curiosity of fans – to see if I can still run the quarter mile.

FOUR COLOR: What is the status of The Spirit TV movie? Has it been shelved?

EISNER: I don't know. I don't really know where it is right now. I know they made the movie last Spring. I've seen a tape of it. Warner Brothers has been offering it to networks. Whether they've succeeded in getting a network sale, so far, I don't know. So far as I know they have not yet succeeded.

I'm really, curiously, uninterested in the whole movie idea. I don't think it is going to aid my career nor is it going to do anything for me other than perhaps make some money. As far as artistically, it is another medium completely. If it's very, very good, they are going to have the credit. If it's very, very bad, theirs is the blame. It doesn't mean anything to me.

FOUR COLOR: How well do you feel your work was captured?

EISNER: Well they captured my work but that's not the point of a movie. I guess you can reverse the question by saying that if somebody came to me with a movie and said , "Make a comic strip," you'd be faced with two things: Either slavishly following the movie concept and coming up with a cardboard work – I remember **Ben Casey** was something like that – or creating something totally different yourself with maybe some of the elements of the character.

In all my experience, I have rarely ever seen a comic strip made from a movie be successful and visa versa. Maybe the first **Superman** was a great movie but what I think happened there was they took an initial concept and did not try to slavishly follow the character himself.

In the minds of most people, I think there is a big mistake. They equate these two mediums too closely. I think they are totally separate mediums.

FOUR COLOR: You still haven't given us an impression of how you liked The Spirit movie.

EISNER: I'd like not to answer that.

FOUR COLOR: Would you discuss your character, Midnight?

EISNER: I didn't create Midnight. Midnight was created by Busy Arnold's staff. it was inspired by Busy Arnold as an effort to create a property for himself that could replace The Spirit in the event I got killed in war.

FOUR COLOR: Visually, he certainly does look like The Spirit

EISNER: That was Arnold's idea. His idea was to have in the wings a property that could very easily replace The Spirit.

FOUR COLOR: Doesn't sound like he was an optimist!

EISNER: It wasn't that he was an optimist or a pessimist, he was just being a careful businessman. It sounds very callous, but I guess from his point of view, it was not. He didn't wish me any harm. He didn't want me to get killed.

The problem was, I owned the property [**The Spirit**]. That was a relationship he did not have with any other artist or person he dealt with. I was truly a partner.

FOUR COLOR: In the 1970s, Marvel announced plans that they were going to publish **The Spirit**. Why did it fall through?

EISNER: For a long time, Stan Lee was after me to get **The Spirit**. The reason it fell through was I was not particularly interested in turning out new material. Stan came to me and said, "What are you doing with **The Spirit**?" I said, well there it is. He said he'd like to publish it. At the same time Jim Warren came to me and said he'd like to publish **The Spirit**. Jim was perfectly willing to reprint **The Spirit**, that is, republish the old **Spirits**. Marvel wanted me to create new material or allow them to find somebody to create new material. I really wasn't interested in that.

Also, I felt better dealing with a smaller publisher for very practical reasons. To Jim Warren, I was one of maybe four properties he had. To Marvel, I was just one of 400 properties they had. I felt I would get better care and attention from Jim Warren than from Marvel

FOUR COLOR: Didn't Marvel announce at one point they were going to team up The Spirit with Spider-Man?

EISNER: I remember that! Jim Shooter came to me and said, "I have this great idea. Let's have The Spirit meet Spider-Man." I said, I think you're running a great danger there. If I were to do it, The Spirit

Con't On Page 66

YAAH
GIT HIM
YEAH GIT HIM

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

will eisner's seasonal gift to the comic medium

By Will Murray

December, 1940. It was a different world. Coal was the heating fuel in most American homes. There was no TV. Americans got their entertainment from radio. In between broadcasts of **The Shadow** and **The Lone Ranger**, we listened to the portentous news of the war in Europe. And we wondered if – or even when – America would become involved. The inconceivability of Pearly Harbor was less than a year away.

The comic book world was different, too. It was all new. **Superman** was in his third year on the stands. **Batman** was only two. **Captain Marvel** was finishing his first phenomenal year of publication. Comic books were selling millions of copies. Super heroes were the rage. And in New York, the legend that was Will Eisner was taking a slightly different path.

Spirited Origins

The story of how 23-year-old Will Eisner created the **Spirit Section** is well known to comic historians. Amid the super hero craze, Everett M. "Busy" Arnold of the Quality Comics Group approached Eisner to package something new. A pullout newspaper comic book. Eisner, having created characters like Wonderman and Sheena for various comic books, was intrigued by the opportunity to combine the comic book with the traditional Sunday funnies in an exciting new form.

The deal required Eisner to both script and draw the lead feature in what was at first called **The Comic Book Section**, and oversee production of two companion features, Lady Luck and Mr. Mystic. Eisner called his lead character The Spirit. Because Eisner had had his fill of super heroes, The Spirit did not much resemble the now-traditional longjohn-suited character. If anything, The Spirit harkened back to Leslie Charteris' roguish Saint.

Although it may have had no bearing on what Eisner created, it's a little-known anecdote of comic history that Eisner was **not** the first creator approached for the project. Around 1939, Arnold approached the late Walter B. Gibson, author of **The Shadow** pulp novels, about adapting his character as the lead feature for the plann-

Illustration By Randy Elliott

Copyright, Will Eisner

SPIRIT
20 DYNAMIC PAGES OF
ELECTRIFYING COLOR!
WARREN
MAGAZINE

ed project. Gibson liked the idea, but couldn't convince his editors at Street & Smith, who owned **The Shadow**, to do business with Arnold. Thus, enter Will Eisner.

The Spirit was really detective Denny Colt. Apparently killed in the course of his first adventure, dated June 1940, Denny emerged from suspended animation to fight crime as the mysterious Spirit. Colt wore no costume other than an unchanging blue suit and hat, plain red tie and – no socks.

"Busy" Arnold got busy when he saw the first installment of The Spirit. He complained to Eisner. He had wanted a super hero. Eisner refused to budge, relenting only as far as giving his character gloves and a domino mask, both blue, with the second installment. An unhappy compromise for Eisner, these concessions in fact enabled The Spirit to walk a fine line between sentimental realism and the broader appeal of the cartoon hero. In short, The Spirit was nearly perfect.

But not immediately. Eisner spent most of 1940 feeling his way to a happy medium. By Christmas he had a semi-humorous feature that relied on sympathetic characterization, O. Henry-style endings slice of life atmosphere, and eschewed the action cliches of the super hero. The Spirit was not omnipotent. He was what we might call today a James Garner-esque hero. He got beaten up a lot. Women fell over him and made a fool of him in turn. Sometimes, they did both. One of the trademarks of the strip was a scrumptious parade of femme fatales, plucked from then-contemporary films and

Copyright, Will Eisner

repainted in comic book colors.

Season's Greetings

Another trademark – it was more of a tradition, really – was the annual Christmas story. The first one was dated December 22, 1940, entitled, as they all were, "The Christmas Spirit."

It opened as The Spirit and his black sidekick, Ebony, are returning home having just deposited ten thousand dollars in the Pauper's National Bank for the poor. As they prepare to bed down in their secret hideout, a lair beneath Denny Colt's tombstone at Wildwood Cemetery, Ebony inquires in his minstrel accent, "Ah kept thinkin', Mist' Spirit Boss . . . ain't yo' gonna try to capture Black Henry tonight?"

"No!" answers the Spirit. "Tonight another spirit fights crime and evil . . . The Spirit of Christmas!"

Cut to Black Henry and his crony, Simple Simon. They're spending Christmas Eve in another way. "This Christmas spirit stuff," Simon opines. "People laughing when there ain't no cause . . . kids believin' in Santy Claus! No wonder there's so much trouble in this world . . . too many kids believe in Santa Claus!"

This gives Black Henry an idea and off they go to rob Pauper's National Bank, dressed as twin Santas.

They succeed. But on their way home with the loot, a white-bearded priest invites them into church where the poor are singing carols and awaiting the presents they will receive from the money that The

Copyright Will Eisner

Joy learns the true meaning of Christmas spirit when he shares his last morsel of food in the 1947 fable.

Spirit had deposited. The crooked pair are touched by the sights and sounds within. A little boy sitting next to Simon offers him an apple. His wish for Christmas is modest, a roast chicken dinner. "'Cause we ain't ever had that at our house!"

Black Henry and Simon slink off with their loot. They're a little sheepish and decide to split up. No sooner said than done, they run into one another back at the Pauper's National Bank.

"Henry! What are you doin' here?" Simon demands.

"Err... I'm givin' back the dough... y'see... well... that is... it's heavy... I mean. ."

"Yeh... I know .Me too!" Simon snaps. "Stop yammin'... an' help close the safe."

Walking through the snow, Simon asks, "I've been thinkin', Henry... did you notice that priest? He looked like old St. Nick himself! I think maybe there really is a Santa Claus!"

The next morning The Spirit, Ebony, Commissioner Dolan and his daughter Ellen, are exchanging presents.

"My present was the happiness I got out of this headline," the Spirit says, "'Stolen money returned by unknown crooks caught by Christmas Spirit.'"

It was a simple, heartwarming story. A distillation of what **The Spirit** strip would be at its best. A year later, Eisner did it again.

Three Wise Men

The second "Christmas Spirit" was dated December 28, 1941. It began with the Christmas Eve arrival of a one-legged young panhandler called King Hobo at Bethlehem... Pennsylvania. In a twist on the Biblical Three Wise Men story, three hobos tell Christmas stones. The third hobo's story involves the evil European dictator, Hansel Angroff, who, upon receiving a visit from Santa Claus, mistakes the offered present for a bomb and has Santa executed before a firing squad. Discovering the present is really a fiddle – a childhood dream present that never came – Angroff walks away from dictatoring and becomes an itinerant fiddler.

During this story, King Hobo falls asleep and the others decide to cheer him up for Christmas and maybe reform him. The third hobo then sneaks off to raise some money to put in King Hobo's stocking. The others, curious, follow and discover the hobo fiddling for money on a street corner. It was Angroff. He had told his own story.

At The Spirit's headquarters, our hero isn't in the Christmas spirit.

"I'm worried about King Hobo," he tells Ebony. "I gave him 24 hours to return the money he stole... he's just a kid, too! I'm afraid I'm going to have to break my rule of not tracking criminals at Christmas."

He's about to don his hat – The Spirit never takes off his mask – when there's a knock at the door.

"O.K. Spirit! H-here's the dough!! I – well – I'm sorry about that job," says an ashamed King Hobo.

The Spirit invites him in to share Christmas Eve and on that note, another Christmas Spirit ends.

Key Christmas Elements

With only the second annual installment, Eisner had established and reinforced the key elements of his Christmas Spirit stories. They were that The Spirit will not fight crime on Christmas. Instead, he trusts the Christmas Spirit to watch over the world. The stories are usually about other characters with The Spirit being an incidental or framing character. Usually, Santa Claus, or someone who might be him, plays a pivotal role in the action.

It's ironic that, just when we needed Eisner's Christmas Spirit stories most, they simply stopped. Eisner's 1941 installment was being prepared around the time that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. America was immediately thrust into the European war. In May of 1942, Will Eisner was drafted.

That was not the end of The Spirit by any means. Eisner turned his **Spirit Section**, as it became known, over to a clutch of assistants. He must have neglected to leave instructions to continue the annual holiday episodes because in the bitter frightened winters of 1942-1944, there was no Christmas cheer to be found in the **Spirit Section**.

Post-war Christmas

Timing is sometimes everything in life. After three years in the Army, where he

wrote and illustrated articles for various military publications for the Pentagon. Eisner returned to civilian life and a postwar world that had seen the **Spirit** section declining from a five million circulation highwater mark thanks to inept creative people and choking paper shortages. It was a coincidence that the first Spirit installment that Eisner had the opportunity to write and draw in 1945 was the Christmas episode and it was a happy one.

In brief, it was the story of millionaire Horton J. Winklenod who is told, very late in life, that there is no Santa Claus. Wandering off in sadness, Winklenod is kidnapped. Left tied up in an old shack, no less than the real Santa descends down the chimney. Winklenod helps Santa give his former captors what they most need, money in their stockings so they can go straight. The story ends with the obligatory Christmas scene at the home of Commissioner Dolan.

With only the second annual installment, Eisner had established and reinforced the key elements of his Christmas Spirit stories. They were that The Spirit will not fight crime on Christmas. Instead, he trusts the Christmas Spirit to watch over the world.

The Christmas Spirit had returned, in more ways than one.

And so it continued for the next few years. The Christmas Spirit of 1946, titled "The Christmas Spirit: A Fable," was unusual. Santa is on strike because of "bad toys" being produced by adults for children – guns, tanks and atom bombs. The Octopus, The Spirit's long-running arch-enemy, is trying to convince a foreign ambassador to vote against a new peace accord. And The Spirit is resisting official blandishments to capture the Cooly Gang on Christmas. It all comes together in a wonderfully Eisnerish entwining of plot threads. But there's a twist. Peace is achieved. War is outlawed. And there is truly, "Peace on earth, good will toward men."

It was, after all, a fable. The familiar postwar reality resumed the following week. And a Christmas Spirit episode duly appeared the following year.

In 1949, Christmas nearly doesn't happen when Kilroy, one of the street kids who populated the postwar Spirit stories, gives a visiting Santa amnesia when he hits him with a rock-filled snowball. Santa's subsequent misadventures, including being jailed for bunko by Commissioner Dolan, were so captivating that there was no room for The Spirit to make an appearance. One fascinating footnote was that the events of the 1946 Christmas story were also set in motion by one of Kilroy's rock snowballs.

Christmas Spirit Without Eisner

In August, 1951, Will Eisner again turned his brainchild over to various assistants. The Christmas Spirit for 1951 did appear, however. Maybe it was a commentary on the caliber of people who produced it – Jules Feiffer presumably scripting for an unidentified artist – or maybe it was the tone of the new Cold War world, but this Christmas Spirit had a bitter undertaste to it.

A sinister individual hires Joe Fix, a sports "fixer," to con Santa Claus into calling off Christmas. Fix accepts the task and flies to the North Pole where he demands to see the "head man." Santa, of course, declines Joe's offer.

"As long as people have belief in Santa Claus, there will always be a Santa Claus," St. Nick sternly insists.

So Fix returns to America to launch the most despicable smear campaign in comic history.

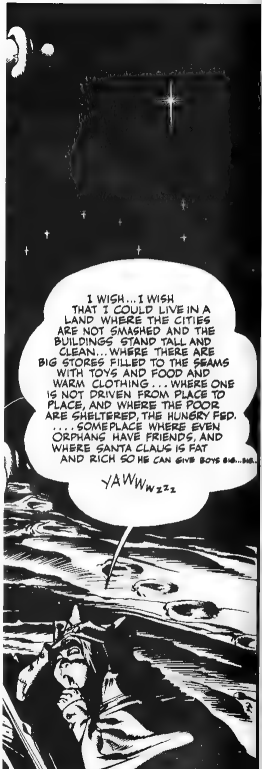
"Who is this man known as Santa Claus?" Fix writes to his congressman. "What motives are behind this self-styled gift-giver? Where does he get his gifts? Who puts up the money?"

With bribes, rumors and innuendo, Fix soon has all America swept up in an anti-Santa hysteria. "Santa Claus Linked to Toy Smugglers" screams one headline. The Spirit and Commissioner Dolan are worried. Even the children are starting to believe the worst of Santa.

Joe Fix returns to the North Pole to find a tearful St. Nick. Santa's been getting death threats instead of toy lists.

"If people no longer believe in me, I will not ride this Christmas," Santa says sadly. "I – I'll go into another business and give this life up."

Thus, on Christmas Eve, Santa is reduced to working the street corners like a Salvation Army colonel. The Spirit knows all about it and wants to go after Fix. But Santa tells him, "Hush, Spirit! on Christmas there is another Spirit at work!"


I WISH...I WISH THAT I COULD LIVE IN A LAND WHERE THE CITIES ARE NOT SMAGHED AND THE BUILDINGS STAND TALL AND CLEAN...WHERE THERE ARE BIG STORES FILLED TO THE SEAMS WITH TOYS AND FOOD AND WARM CLOTHING...WHERE ONE IS NOT DRIVEN FROM PLACE TO PLACE, AND WHERE THE POOR ARE SHELTERED, THE HUNGRY FED. ....SOMEPLACE WHERE EVEN ORPHANS HAVE FRIENDS, AND WHERE SANTA CLAUS IS FAT AND RICH SO HE CAN GIVE BOYS BIG...BIG...
YAWWwzzz

Copyright Will Eisner

Copyright Will Eisner

Comes the joyless midnight and Joe Fix looks at the check he's collected for his evil work. The signature reads, "Lucifer Mephistopheles."

Fix is shocked but decides to take it in stride.

"I never got any presents when I was a kid," he sneers. "Why should I care?" But the sight of a tearful street urchin stops him cold

"Whatsa matter, kid?" Fix demands. "Didn't Santa Claus bring you nothin'?"

"There ain't no Santa Claus," the urchin insists halfheartedly. Wordlessly, Fix signs the million-dollar check over to Santa and drops it in Santa's collection box.

"You see, Spirit," Santa tells our hero "A contribution from the Devil himself! Well I have to go now. I've a lot of gifts to deliver tonight!"

A happy ending? Perhaps But it's a story that could not have been published in 1941. And the undertone of the coming blot of McCarthyism was a portent of a new world, one in which Will Eisner's innocent characters, regrettably, did not belong.

It was the final Christmas Spirit. Ten months later, on October 5, 1952, the final **Spirit Section** was published. Will Eisner's postwar work for the military had compelled him to suspend the **Spirit Section**. It was still a commercial success but it was clearly time to move on.

The Best of the Best

In succeeding years, The Spirit came back to haunt Will Eisner like a Dickensian shade Harvey Comics revived the old **Spirit** comic book as a reprint vehicle in 1966. Although it lasted only two issues, it whetted the collective appetite of a new generation of comic fans, who recognized it as something special. In the Seventies, more successful reprint comics were born, and the latest incarnation, Kitchen Sink's monthly **Spirit** comic book, continues to keep Will Eisner's creation alive. Included in this incarnation are the annual Christmas Spirit installments.

The Christmas Spirit stories were classics of their genre, the comic book equivalent to Forties holiday films like **It's A Wonderful Life**. All of Eisner's work is scored by sentimental music, but the Christmas Spirits especially stood out. They possess a festive, homey warmth the others do not. And they were, in their way, a reflection of the ups and downs of this legendary comic series. Read Will Eisner's Spirit and you've read the best comic books can offer Read the Christmas spirits and you've read the best of the best

Eisner On Christmas!

FOUR COLOR: The first **Christmas Spirit** story appeared in December of 1940. What inspired you to create a Christmas Spirit?

EISNER: **The Spirit** was the Sunday newspaper section and it's traditional, in the Sunday papers, for the comics to recognize the Christmas holiday. It was also necessary, I felt, to keep **The Spirit** a timely situation. **The Spirit**, unlike a comic book, had a sense of timeliness, seasonality to it.

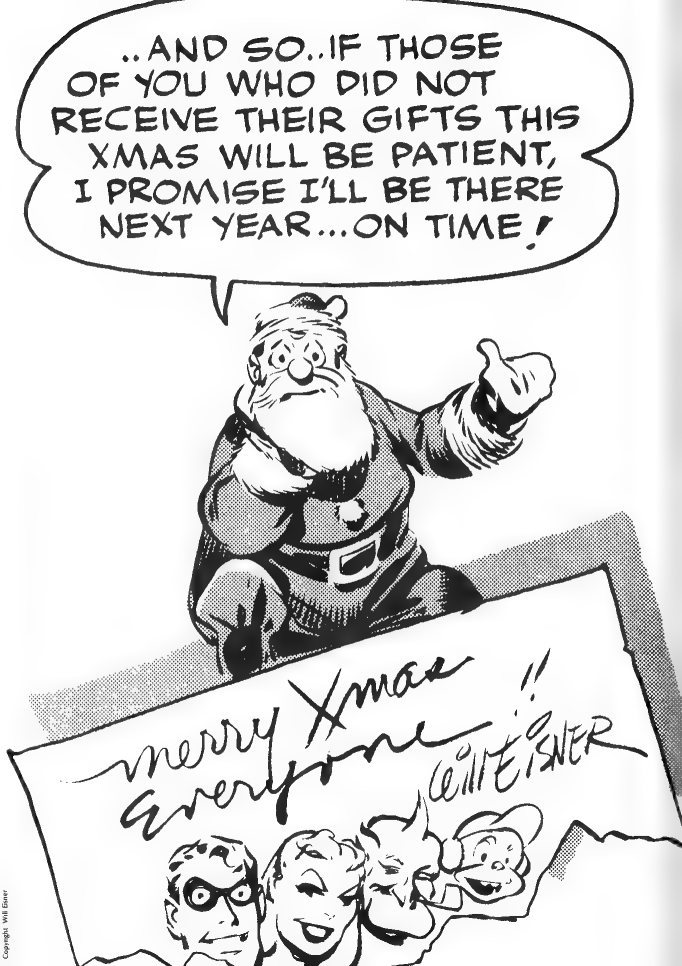
FOUR COLOR: What is your perspective of Christmas as a man of the Jewish faith?

EISNER: As a Jew, of course, I don't recognize Christmas, although it falls at a time when the Hanuka holidays occur. I always saw Christmas as a very valid time, almost a sociological event. I guess I look at it more anthropologically than I do as a religious time. I think it is a remarkable time when human beings all seem to get together to acknowledge goodness, if you will. It has been bastardized and commercialized enormously but there is something rather remarkable about the whole idea that has always intrigued me.

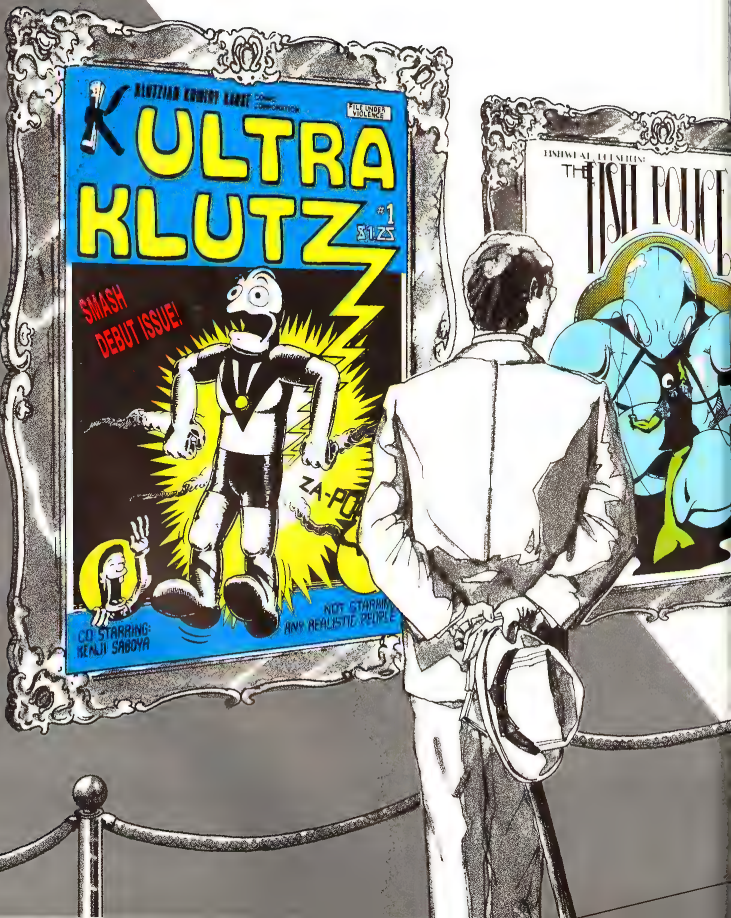
FOUR COLOR: You went to a lot of trouble to share these **Christmas Spirits** every year. They must hold a special place in your heart. Would you tell us why?

EISNER: They were, again, a recognition of man's desire to be good. One of the unique things about our society and mankind is that despite all the evidence to the contrary, man still wants to believe he is good. I think there is a kind of mystical phenomenon that occurs at Christmas. It is almost like the wishful thinking on the part of people of having everybody stop whatever they're doing one day a year and pray all together. It seems to have that kind of mystical hold on me.

EC


..AND SO..IF THOSE OF YOU WHO DID NOT RECEIVE THEIR GIFTS THIS XMAS WILL BE PATIENT, I PROMISE I'LL BE THERE NEXT YEAR...ON TIME!
merry Xmas everyone!!
WILL EISNER

Copyright Will Eisner


KLUTZIAN COMIC KARE
FILE UNDER VIOLENCE
ULTRA KLUTZ
#1
SMASH DEBUT ISSUE!
ZA-POW
CO STARRING: KENJI SABOVA
NOT STARRING ANY REALISTIC PEOPLE
FINHEAD ILLUSIONS
THE FISH POLICE

Usa Kidz's copyright, Klutzen komedy Kuzee Fish Pot'ee's copyright, Tidewise Productions Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is copyright Mirage Studios

THE SHORT, HAPPY LIFE OF THE BLACK AND WHITES

The after-effects of milking green from black-and-whites

In the late 1920s, it was possible to buy stock in anything, often with little or no money down. Speculation ran rampant until the stock market crashed. Then banks started to fold all over America and the nation entered the Great Depression.

In the mid-1980s, it was possible to buy a black-and-white comic book featuring just about any combination of adjectives and animals, in greater and lesser grades of quality. Again, speculation ran wild and anything published in black-and-white that said "Number One" on the cover sold and sold out in a hurry. Is history preparing to repeat itself or is the black-and-white comics industry strong enough to survive its current recession?

To answer the question requires far more than a quick reading of the various titles on the market today. Rather, it requires an investigation of the business side of the publishing industry, irrespective of artistic merit. True, art and story are supposed to be what comics are about but, especially in recent years, the more serious aspects of supply and demand come into play.

The Food Chain of Comics

Everybody must eat, but there is a definite order to where the food comes from. In this business, rather than little fish getting eaten by progressively bigger fish, the system seems to run in reverse. The comics producer must depend upon the distributor to solicit orders for the producer's book. The distributor must depend upon the retail shop owners to place orders for the book. Then the distributor(s) tell the producer how many copies of an issue have been ordered. Once the book comes off the press, the distributor sends it

By Ron Thomas

KA-RAK
THE SWORD!
I HAVE COME FOR THE SWORD!
GEEZ!
ARE YOU NUTS? ARE YOU CRAZY?
I JUST HAD THE LOCK FIXED, AND NOW THIS! MY LANDLADY WILL HAVE A FIT!
I CARE NOT ABOUT YOUR LANDLADY. THE SWORD MUST BE RETURNED!
THE FISH POLICE
HALLOTUH
SUDS-GUZZLER? BUT WE WERE GONNA WATCH THE GAME TOGETHER.
THE FISH-BOWL? IS THAT ON TODAY?
YEP.
CAN'T BELIEVE S.Q.U.I.D. MAKES YOU GUYS WORK ON THE DAY OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP.
Fish Police is copyright Fishwrap Productions

to the retailer who places it before the consumer

What has been happening, roughly since the summer of 1985, is that more and more black-and-white titles have been coming on to the market, apparently more than the existing demand can support. In this sort of supply-side economics, this situation is called a glut, like the current international oil glut. In free market economics, a glut should drive prices down and that has been the case at the gasoline pump. However, the price on comics is rather fixed since it costs a certain amount to publish and that fixed cost makes the price a fixed amount too. Thus, if demand isn't high enough and prices are relatively fixed, supply has to come down. It's an ugly fact, but economics is seldom a pretty sight.

In the case of the black-and-white comics, this means that the supply must come down to get the market back into balance. Either, the number of titles on the market will have to be cut or the number of each title sold will come down through consumer or dealer action. Unfortunately, it doesn't look as though either is going to happen. The market is going to have to do something, a new boom has to come or, more likely, a bust is around the corner.

Retailers Are Getting Cautious

"If you order ten and sell nine, you feel pretty good," said Gary Colabuono of the Chicago, Il Moondog chain of comics stores regarding the current black-and-white market "Other than **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** and **Cerebus**, nothing else really sells well." He said that the other titles coming out in black-and-white are what he considers marginal compared to what he could make on stronger material like Marvel and resurgent DC titles.

Colabuono had been advertising the comprehensive line of books that he carries, including almost everything that comes out in black-and-white but now stated, "I'm changing my ads. This stuff is so trashy that it's not worth my while to carry them . . .I can't believe I'm paying a guy to order this stuff," he added, exasperatedly describing the task of his buyer who spends "80 percent of his time" going through order sheets trying to decide which titles to carry.

The task of ordering is made more difficult when it's hard to know what a new black-and-white title is going to look like. "We have to order blindly without return privileges," said Bob Gray of the Twilight Book and Game Emporium in Syracuse, N.Y. Even so, Gray said that he tries "a couple of issues of just about everything. . . I'm cautious on ordering black-and-whites and try just to order a small amount."

Gray is quick to criticize a lot of the new black-and-white material noting that much of it is, "A big waste of our time. The success of a couple of good titles has supported a lot of weaker material."

"If you saw pre-production art on some of this stuff you wouldn't buy it at all," said Rodger Shomo of Right Stuff Books and Comics in Westland, Mi. "Cutting orders to the bone doesn't help any more."

Tom Flynn of Capital City Distribution said that the problem is often complicated, even if production art is available. He said some of the smaller publishers might spend a lot of time to create a great looking splash page to send out to solicit orders but the rest of the book often doesn't live up to the promotional art.

"We have to sell garbage from Marvel and DC," said Gray. "We don't need any more."

That may not be a problem in the summer of 1987 as many shop owners are predicting a serious decline in the number of titles available then Bill Hatfield of Novel Ideas in Gainesville, Fl , said that, "If there are 100 titles now, this time next year, there'll be 20 to 25. The rest of them have got to drop. I don't know what the next fad will be but I don't think it'll be black and whites next summer."

With dry sarcasm he said, "This summer you could sell just about anything that wasn't colored."

Part of the high demand was artificial and caused by heavy speculation, according to Gray. Shomo agreed, adding that "a lot of people are going to get burned."

The amount of wild hoarding and speculating this past summer has created artificially high prices and given producers an unrealistic idea of the demand out in the market for black-and-white books. Therefore the glut may have to adjust itself the hard way with small publishers going under. This would be a relief to some store owners who simply don't have enough display space for the titles currently on the market, let alone any new entries.

"We like to keep at least two months' worth on the rack," said Gray, "but we're finding we can't even do that for bigger independents like Eclipse."

Colabuono said that he's "racking books on top of each other" and sometimes only showing the top left corner. Seeing full covers is almost a thing of the past as the new black-and white entries squeeze each other out.

One group of publishers really getting the squeeze is the "mid-range" of First, Eclipse and other more established lines. The store owners will continue to give plenty of rack space to the big guns, Marvel and DC, and need rack space to move their sinking investment in the new black-and-whites. This keeps titles like **Jon Sable** from getting featured spots in the store.

Some store owners are looking to their distributors for guidance and relief. Gray said, "The buck's got to stop somewhere. Somebody's got to be responsible for calling a halt to it [the B&W glut]. It should be up to the distributors.

The store owners want their distributors to help them determine which titles are worth carrying in terms of artistic merit and long-term appeal. It's a lot like asking your butcher how good the meal is going to taste. He's not the one who has to eat it.

Distributors Claim "We Can't Be Critics"

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Flynn at Capital City said that it's difficult to put any kind of comment in their order forms without offending one of the publishers. However, he recognizes that the distributor does have to help the store owner make intelligent decisions. "We've got to call a spade a spade. . . A lot of people had some talent but the material ruins the gamut from very professional to extremely amateurish."

Flynn said that Capital City has taken some steps to cut back the number of really dreadful titles that get into the system. For example, he said that they will stop listing titles "unless we at least see a page." Even so, he said that Capital City had 53 new black-and-white first issues on its November order sheet and 59 **more**

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is copyright Mirage Studios

number ones on its December solicitation.

Another distributor that is taking steps to get a handle on this plethora of black and white titles is Bud Plant, Inc. Purchasing agent Paul Blair said that the California distributor is planning to poll in one of their upcoming Comics News Updates "to find out if [stores] are getting stuck." He added that he thinks "distributors owe retailers a screening." However, the offer sheets from Bud Plant are also quite full. Blair counted 77 multi-title listings in Plant's December solicitation.

"I hope the retailers are wising up," Blair said. "I've got to have feedback from them. . . I don't want them to feel they have to buy something because we solicit for it."

Blair added that if the summer of '86 was of earthquake proportions in terms of black-and-white sales, the summer of '87 might see an aftershock. There might be a wave of books not as big as before but still very significant. Going back to the producers can help to show where the glut came from. Blair said that some of the smaller independent black-and-white publishers printed before they had orders.

Producers Exude Conservative Confidence

One producer of black-and-white titles who already has orders in for his new books is Jim Friel of Eclipse. Both **Zot!** and **Crossfire** are slated to return as black-and white books after debuting as color titles. "We already have orders. They're respectable but not extremely high. Still, they're at a profitable level."

He said the decision to switch from color to black-and-white format was strictly economic. Both titles were losing money but had a "nice solid hard-core group of followers." This established market is just what Friel is counting on to make these two entries successful. Other factors that will help are Eclipse's established color line and the well-known Eclipse trademark that the two new books will carry. Friel said that he has another black-and-white project on the back burner. It's a Japanese book that was done in black-and-white originally that he may be producing for late spring or early summer of '87.

Going the other way is Blackthorne, publishers of **Hamster Vice** and **Pre-Teen Dirty Gene Kung Fu Kangaroos**. Publisher Steve Schanes said that Blackthorne is planning a line of ten color titles to follow up their black-and-white line. He has a clear picture of the pros and cons of publishing in color or black and-white.

In black and whites, "there's less risk, more upside, it's easier to get into," he said. "The time and production outlay is less and there's a lot of market share to gain. There's more possible profit in black-and-white than in color."

Schanes said that Blackthorne should be able to handle the addition of ten color titles to its existing line of twenty titles. He sees opportunities in the comics business that other companies are not chasing, feeling that both Marvel and DC are vulnerable. He stated that DC has "a half dozen hot books but they're not going for the jugular in market share." He added that it's companies like Blackthorne, First, Eclipse and Comico that have a real chance to get the number two position in the industry if they can come up with the next "hot character."

In black-and-whites "there's less risk, more upside, it's easier to get into," said Steve Schanes of Blackthorne Publishing. "The time and production outlay is less and there's a lot of market share to gain. There's more possible profit in black-and-white than in color."

In a way, that justifies the current glut as almost anything can get a shot at the marketplace. Schanes said that "to get market share, you've got to have product. However, we try to be selective." Part of that selectivity is in production values. He stated that it's important for black-and-white publishers to become more knowledgable about printing specifications and how to work with professional printers on camera-work, negatives and printing or else their "perceived quality level is lower."

Interestingly enough, one of the giants of the comics business used to be into black-and-whites in a big way but got out of it. Larry Hama edits Marvel's **Savage Sword of Conan**, the only black-and-white title that still gets newsstand distribution. He indicated that **Savage Sword** survived because of its title character. The other books that Marvel published back in the late 1970s like **Planet of the Apes** and **Deadly Hands of Kung Fu**, "just died. They no longer fulfilled the needs of that market."

As to whether or not Marvel could ever enter the black-and-white realm, possibly a smart move if a big market exists, Hama said, "I don't know that there is a burgeoning market. It's very hard to sell a black-and-white book."

Hard Times Are Coming

No matter what approach one takes to the black-and white comics industry, one conclusion is inescapable; some bad economic decisions are being made. If this continues, the crash may be right around the corner. Each level of the industry may feel the crunch.

For the producers, a shakeout is coming not unlike what the home computer industry experienced a few years before. The publishers that can put out a good product with a dependable publishing schedule will make it. There may be half or less than half as many black-and-white publishers around within the next two to six months. They'll fold or be absorbed.

For the distributors, a reduction in orders is likely. Store owners are feeling a space pinch and cannot afford to stock every title that comes out. If distributors don't help the store owners buy wisely, they may not have as many stores to solicit.

For the retailers, many of whom are already in debt to their distributors, cash flow problems are coming. It's not unlike the farm debt crisis in America today. The store owners are going to have to move into lines with more dependable sales to offset the bath many took on risky black-and-whites.

For the consumers, wild speculation last summer may lead to many disappointed "investors" who are sitting on several number one issues that will never be followed by a number two. These people, as Blair termed it, were like sharks at a "feeding frenzy. The more you threw out there, the more they ate."

The only trouble with feeding frenzies is that sometimes the sharks end up eating each other.

The author wishes to thank Paul Blair, Gary Colabuono, Tom Flynn, Bob Gray, Larry Hama, Roger Shomo and Steve Schanes for their assistance with this article.

FC

THE NEVER-ENDING SUPER HERO CYCLE

The future of super heroes lies in aggressive marketing toward older readers.

By Mark Ellis

Currently, there are 99 super hero comics being published per month by the major companies and the independents. That figure doesn't include reprint albums or one-shots. Moreover, a large number of the titles could disappear overnight. Others are primed to take their places – virtually overnight – and there doesn't appear to be an end in sight, at least in this particular decade.

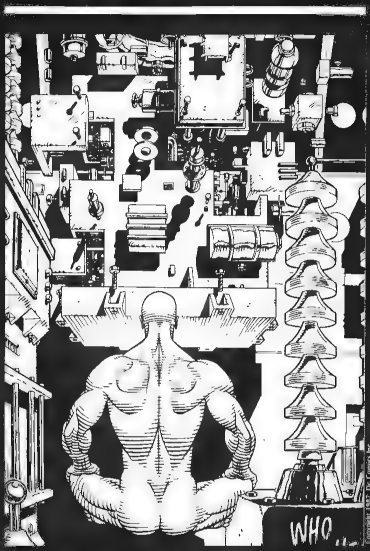
So, the question that is usually asked by disapproving outsiders is, "Who buys this junk anyhow and why?"

The first query is easy to answer. The majority of super hero consumers consist of adolescent males. The "why" is a bit more difficult to respond to. Editors of mainstream comic books have stated more than once that the median age group of their readers is 11 to 15 years old. Therefore, their output is specifically tailored for the viewpoints and mind-sets of this age group. Recently, however, the **Wall Street Journal** conducted a survey in specialty shops. Their findings showed that the average patron of a direct-sales outlet was 21 years old, had at least two years of college education and spent anywhere from $20 to $50 a month at the store.

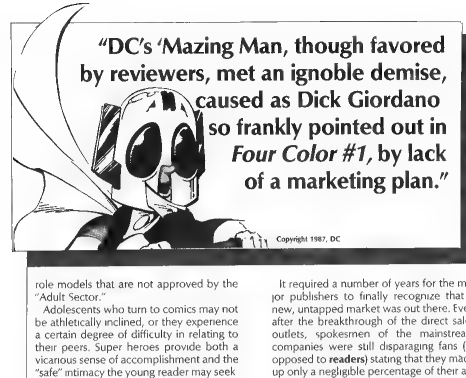
Adolescent Appeal

We have two different demographic surveys, but only recently was there more than one marketing strategy. Adults may buy comics, but the appeal of super heroes has been, and to a great extent always will be, to male adolescents. The reasons for this are varied. Super hero titles are consciously tailored to appear as both vehicles for vicarious thrills and as **role models**. The latter aspect is perhaps the most important quality of insuring a super character's ultimate success or failure in the marketplace.

A 13 or 14-year-old male, generally speaking, is undergoing a constant but unconscious search for an identity. Paths that lead to adulthood are usually chosen at this age. A boy who may not be particularly introspective or imaginative might choose to involve himself in sports or other activities that limit interpersonal contact to the narrow parameters of a team game. Children who choose this path (or more likely, have it chosen **for** them) are under pressure to perform, conform and excel in the public eye. Therefore, despite any inner needs, they are not encouraged to develop their imagination or have any



"It is quite possible for a reader who doesn't take the medium too seriously to find pleasure in both *Secret Wars* and *The Watchmen*."


"DC's 'Mazing Man, though favored by reviewers, met an ignoble demise, caused as Dick Giordano so frankly pointed out in *Four Color #1*, by lack of a marketing plan."
Copyright 1987, DC

role models that are not approved by the "Adult Sector."

Adolescents who turn to comics may not be athletically inclined, or they experience a certain degree of difficulty in relating to their peers. Super heroes provide both a vicarious sense of accomplishment and the "safe" intimacy the young reader may seek. Pushed around at school, maybe even alienated from his contemporaries, the adolescent can imagine himself putting on a mask and avenging the wrongs done to him. Thus, the super hero figure is universal as a focus for daydreaming.

To an adolescent, the best kind of role model is a man who takes direct and usually violent action against adversity. The role model may be a basically gentle man who finds himself beset by a sea of troubles (Shang Chi, Silver Surfer, Daredevil), or a rowdy hell-raiser who seeks out trouble (Ben Grimm, Wolverine) in order to chase away the doldrums. In both instances, problems are solved by the simple expediency of fists against faces.

Certainly, there are different levels and strata of this attitude, that explains the daring approaches of **Dark Knight**, **The Watchmen** and **Miracleman**, but the out put still deals primarily with people in masks and tights. Only the comparatively adult themes of **The Watchmen** could be transplanted to another milieu without losing its unique characteristics.

The independent companies sprang up and expanded because, theoretically, the people behind them were disgruntled by the immature output of the mainstream publishers and assumed that many potential readers shared their dissatisfaction. Their magazines still dealt in the main with super-folk, but their product was geared toward a bit more adult mindset. Granted this combination of adolescent themes and "mature" execution was sometimes little more than presenting a super hero spouting profanity in a fight scene, but the success of the early endeavors showed that the target audience did exist.

It required a number of years for the major publishers to finally recognize that a new, untapped market was out there. Even after the breakthrough of the direct sales outlets, spokesmen of the mainstream companies were still disparaging fans (as opposed to **readers**) stating that they made up only a negligible percentage of their audience. For decades, they were content to rest upon their reputations, relying on intuition, mediocre sales figures and editorial whims to create "hit" characters. Jim Mooney, veteran artist of hundreds of comics features, was in on the creation of Supergirl, Omega and others. The process of creation he describes is far less complex than today's: "At DC, Mort Weisinger would go to Harry Donenfeld with an idea. If Donenfeld didn't like it, it died. At Marvel, Stan Lee would bounce it off Martin Goodman. If Martin didn't like it, he wouldn't bounce it back. That simple."

Comic Publishers' Breakthrough

The majors were forced to change their practices and collective minds when they perceived that more and more direct-sales books were becoming unqualified and enviable successes.

DC Comics in particular has made electrifying in-roads by utilizing modern marketing techniques. They realized, that when all was said and done, all they had to sell, were characters. These characters, however, over the course of three generations, had become true parts of Americana. They decided to redefine these classic heroes in order to appeal to the new "mature" audience that was making its voice heard and buying power known.

DC did so in such a way that, though they have stirred up controversy and criticism, no one is apathetic about their efforts. But, more importantly, their efforts were noticed by the general public. Up until a few months ago, Superman and Batman were never mentioned in the press except in their connection to cinema/TV adaptations. But with the media attention afforded by **The Man of Steel** and **The Dark Knight**, the commonweal was made aware that these characters existed and were successes long before they appeared in other mediums.

DC in general and their marketing director Peggy May in particular, went after the newly-perceived audience with admirable intelligence and style. Posters, 3-D "points of purchase displays," news releases and merchandise all relating to their big push appeared in retail outlets nation-wide. John Byrne was interviewed on the **Today Show** and Frank Miller's views on The Batman were aired in **Rolling Stone**. The super hero fan was forced, whether he was a die-hard partisan of one company or another, to realize that DC's most famous characters were rebounding with a vengeance.

Perhaps their most successful ploy was in matching the "right" writer/artist to the "right" feature. The past several years have seen the rise of the fan-favorite, and DC, wisely, went after the Top Guns to work on **their** Top Guns.

Comico followed much the same line of reasoning with **Jonny Quest**. Readers in their 20s and 30s remember the cartoon show with fondness, but Comico was not relying just on these long-time **Quest** fans to insure the book's success. Prior to the debut of the magazine, beautifully rendered posters and hand-outs appeared in the specialty shops. The news releases that cited all the major talents involved with the product favorably impressed even the most jaded comics reader. Joe Barbera appeared on talk shows, ostensibly to reminisce about the old days with Huckleberry Hound and Snagglepuss, but also to push the new **Jonny Quest** comic. Anyone who strolled into a direct sales outlet was made aware of Comico's new project and made to feel that it was an **event** to look forward to. Comico's efforts paid off. Originally slated as a mini-series, **Jonny Quest** is now a regular monthly book.

Marketing Setbacks

"The New Universe titles were packaged, logically enough as a *package.* Handouts and fliers and in-house ads all hinted at something big and momentous."

Conversely, there have been a few failures using the aforementioned marketing techniques. Before the debut of Marvel's **X-Factor**, a video tape showcasing a mocked-up brainstorming session of the book's creative team made the rounds of the retail shops. This experiment, though not an out-and-out flop, did not elicit that thrill of anticipation that DC managed to spark a few months later.

The New Universe titles were packaged, logically enough as a **package**. Handouts and fliers and in-house ads all hinted at something big and momentous. When the books finally appeared, the response was not quite the outpouring of gratitude Marvel had hoped for. Illogically, the assumption seemed to be that if a reader liked one New Universe book, he would like them all. Sadly, that hasn't been the case.

DC's **Amazing Man**, though favored by reviewers, met an ignoble demise, caused as Dick Giordano so frankly pointed out in **Four Color #1**, by lack of a marketing plan.

There is an interesting dichotomy at work in the comics marketplace today. Undeniably, super heroes are the biggest sellers, and great effort is being put forth to bridge the gap between the adolescent and "adult" fan. Often this bridge falls apart. It is unlikely that a card-carrying Marvelite who finds **Secret Wars** the pinnacle of comics literature will enjoy (or even comprehend) **The Watchmen**, but it is quite possible for a reader who doesn't take the medium too seriously to find pleasure in both. The comics industry wants this kind of nonpartisan readership, but the only manner in which they may seek them out is publishing even more super heroes, and that results in a flooded market and the cancellation of titles.

Making A Successful Super Hero

Costumed super heroes will always be the province of comic magazines. For simple, economic reasons, they have to be. No other genre has ever enjoyed more than a fleeting success within the industry. But with 99 other heroes to compete with, what makes a new character an industry champion cannot be merely a superior marketing strategy. Bob Gray of the Twilight Book and Game Emporium in Syracuse, N.Y., tends to believe that what makes a super hero successful rests upon whether an individual character reflects the tenor of the times: "Wolverine became a hot success because he's very emotional and strikes out against things that don't agree with his philosophy. Captain America was very popular during World War II, but after the war he was much less successful."

Heroes spawned during the tumultous mid-60s and early '70s did not enjoy the longevity of Captain America. The pacifistic Silver Surfer is often disparaged as a "galactic crybaby of embarrassing proportions," the Geek was simply too silly to relate to and Captain Marvel (the deceased one) was alternately exemplary and abysmal. It's interesting to observe that of Hawk and Dove, two characters created specifically to mirror the confused sensibilities of the '60s, only Hawk survives.

Obviously, it is not primarily the "right hero for the right time" or sharp marketing that can make or break a super character. Jean Gatta, proprietor of the direct-sales outlet, The Fandom Zone, believes that the success of a particular title is often luck, despite a company's efforts to raise fan interest. Using the **Dark Knight** as a case in point, she says, "Even DC didn't foresee its enormous popularity. It happened more or less by accident. They didn't extend the original print run in anticipation of first issue re-orders."

Though Ms. Gatta is optimistic about the future of the super hero comic, and "can't see that the companies will ever backtrack in their marketing strategies," she does wonder if such high pressure tactics are in the best long range interest of the industry. "Far too many good, but under-publicized comics are being squeezed out by DC's and Marvel's gaudy packages."

Additionally, she thinks that the industry having such a high public profile may eventually prove deleterious to the fun of comics: "When I see someone buy two issues of one title, I wonder is this a fan or speculator?"

In a market saturated with super people, turtles, gerbils and teenagers, even a new, wildly original concept may sink without a trace. Marketing tactics notwithstanding, the present situation perfectly illustrates the adage about not seeing the forest because of the trees. One-shot wonders from new independent publishers only add confusion to the population explosion.

DC and Marvel obviously have the advantage because their product is far more familiar to the average reader. DC in particular is making an astonishing turnaround with their "if you liked our heroes when you were a kid, you'll love them as an adult" technique. Whether their comeback bottoms out gradually and gracefully, or whether they'll simply **hit** bottom remains to be seen.

As Gray says, "The super hero stuck with the industry because it's a formula that sells. The publishers have tried everything."

This is certainly true, almost to the point that the entire genre is on the verge of being mined out. "Everything" to do with super heroes **has** been tried. Merchandising, inter-company crossovers, novelizations, movie and TV tie-ins and graphic novels. It all **looks** good, at least superficially.

The Real Arch-foe

Quite fortunately, quality has won out over slick packaging. Fans don't mind shelling out $2.50 or so for something as well-wrought as **The Watchmen**, **Nexus** or **Ronin**. But they do object when they pay that much or more for say, **The Aladdin Effect**, that promises high quality and fails to deliver. After a few times of feeling betrayed, they may think twice or three times about spending that much for a product that **appears** of high-caliber but has

THIS NASTY LITTLE bug is called Drab He's the "best friend" of that idol o'millions, Superswine. Remember the saying, "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all"? That's the reason Drab never says too much. He hates everyone. Read Kaptain Keen and Kompany every other month so he can hate you, too.

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no real substance or worth.

If enough readers are gulled by glossy packaging, breathless news releases and high powered marketing for something that is substandard, then every new "instant collector's item" will be viewed with distrust. And worse, they may not open their wallets **or** their minds

With the fierce competition in today's marketplace, the future could very well see another "implosion." This time, however, instead of damaging only a single company, the entire industry may be dealt a severe blow.

All trends and cycles run their course eventually. It certainly has happened before with TV series, musical tastes and films. If the super hero wheel completes its final revolution, disaster will quickly follow. For the only **real** arch-foe of the super hero is reader disinterest.

In the final installment of this forum, projections for the future of super heroes are discussed.

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in review

Welcome to the second "In Review" section of **Four Color Magazine.** We'd like to take a moment and explain our reviewing policies. Titles reviewed are chosen by our regular review staff from those available at direct sales outlets. Publishers wishing to submit advance copies of titles should send them to the editor-in-chief of **Four Color.** Submitted issues are randomly assigned to reviewers.

Four Color invites readers to submit their opinions of titles reviewed and matters addressed in this section. Essentially, **your** opinions of **our** opinions will make up a dialogue page that will be enjoyed by fellow readers and professionals in the comic book industry.

Likeable Loudmouth

Besides being hilarious, the first page of the second issue of Now Comics' **Ralph Snart** lets the reader know immediately that writer/artist Marc Hansen is a new cartoonist who really has what it takes. The book's opening sequence is one of the funniest gags to appear in a comic in a long while (too funny, in fact, to spoil by describing it here). Best of all, the rest of the book lives up to the high promise of Hansen's first three panels, with a story and main character that are as fresh and entertaining as anything yet published in the burgeoning new black-and white comics field.

Whereas too often the writers and artists creating the new b&w titles exhibit varying degrees of amateurishness in their work, Hansen's talent comes across as fully formed and professional. While he has obviously been influenced by Robert Crumb, Hansen's style is his own, with none of the derivativeness and self-consciousness that mars the work of too many newer artists. His art style is both funny and attractive and exudes self-confidence even in the book's more experimental sequences. His gags and characterizations are similarly expert, and his dialogue never sacrifices character for an easy laugh. In short, Marc Hansen's work in **Ralph Snart** is blessedly free of almost all the shortcomings of the majority of its black-and-white peers.

Hansen's main man Ralph Snart is the most likeable loudmouth since David Boswell's Reid Fleming. Unfortunately, I missed Ralph's "origin" issue, so I'm not sure exactly what led to his current condition, but as issue #2 begins, Ralph has been "left for dead along a lonely stretch of highway by the evil Dr. Goot, in the depths of a tormented dream." Dreaming seems to be the sawed-off little runt's one "super power," in that he has the ability to transport himself through his dreams to different worlds that he creates for himself. It's a nifty gimmick, especially in Hansen's hands, and it should provide many amusing possibilities for future stories without growing stale.

In #2, Ralph escapes into a fantasyland based around a role-playing game called "Blood 'n' Guts." At the beginning of his adventures he runs into an alcoholic wizard who helps Ralph in his different quests of courage. Unfortunately, Ralph just doesn't seem to have what it takes to be a true adventurer and succeeds only in nearly killing himself each time, much to the amusement of his companion–and the reader. As with the book's opening joke, too much description of Ralph's various "errands" would diminish the impact of Hansen's extremely well-done gags. My favorite is the final episode where Ralph finally meets the dreaded one-eyed vixen, that climaxes with a tour-de-force comedic sequence as good as the first.

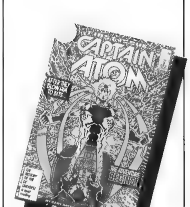
Ralph Snart has the potential to be a true classic, and it's already funnier and more well done than at least 95% of the competition. I hope the book's monthly schedule doesn't prove too taxing for Marc Hansen, and if it does I hope Now Comics cuts its publishing frequency instead of sacrificing quality. As it stands now, **Ralph Snart** is the kind of all-too-rare comic book that you can actually show to non-fan friends and know they'll enjoy it. And that's the ultimate praise for any comic.

Steve Monaco

Atomic Returns

Ever have the experience of running into a friend that you haven't heard from for a while, talking with them (in an attempt to recapture the Good Times), and coming away with the feeling that they're not the same person they used to be? That's not quite the case with DC's **Captain Atom** revival, but it's as good a way as any to start this review.

What DC has done with this ex-



Charlton hero is a lot like what they did in the opening of the Silver Age of comics, that is, take the name (and basic powers) of a popular hero of the past, and build from there. It worked back then with the Flash, Green Lantern and Hawkman; it just might work with Captain Atom. We are to assume, I suppose, that the Captain Atom who fought in the **Crisis** and who came by **his** powers by dropping a screwdriver at the **worst** possible moment, has been rubbed out by the magic anti-matter eraser. I'll miss him.

This time around, it's 1968. Our hero, Captain Nathaniel Adam, is a suspected traitor who volunteers for the mysterious "Captain Atom Project" that has something to do with a UFO that crash-landed in Nevada a year before. If he survives the project, all charges against him will be dropped. If not, well. . .

Comes time for the experiment, and instead of bonding Capt. Adam to a "weird metal alloy" found in the UFO that "can protect a man from just about anything," there's an explosion and the good Captain is vaporized.

Or so it seems.

Eighteen years later, Captain Adam returns, having been catapulted through the fourth dimension by the blast. His wife has married his worst enemy (one Colonel Wade Eiling—now **General** Eiling), his children are almost as old as he is, and those charges against him still haven't been dropped. On the other hand, he now has a shiny metal skin that can deflect bullets and laser beams, is able to throw quantum blasts with the best of them and can fly, but somehow, it just doesn't balance out.

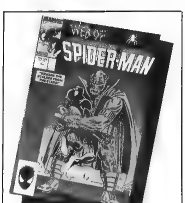
In the meantime, Eiling has tried to destroy Adam once or twice and, having failed, has convinced the president to use Adam, now Captain Atom, as a high profile deep-cover government agent (Huh?). With treason charges still against him ("This administration," Eiling explains, "is under no obligation to honor any promises made to you on the authority of a previous chief executive." Doesn't seem kosher, if you ask me.), the good Captain has no choice but to agree to be "America's newest superhero."

There are a lot of plot holes here. For example, why try to make a suspected traitor the most powerful guy in the world? And when you succeed, why try to kill him off? Not to mention that rescinding of Adam's presidential pardon: I mean, he did survive the project, after all. By-and-large, author Cary Bates has done a good job with carrying the Cold War paranoia of the original Charlton series over into the general paranoia of the 1980s. Although I don't really care for yet **another** corrupt government official. Don't we get enough of them in **real** life? Eiling has enough sides to him to keep him interesting for a while. There are also a lot of unanswered questions, par for the course for first issues. Who were those aliens? What was the successor to the original Captain Atom Project? Why did Eiling want to kill Adam and the head of the original project? Hah? Why? Inquiring minds want to know!

The art team for **Captain Atom** is Pat Broderick, inked by Bob Smith. They're no Steve Ditko, but then, who is? What with DC reviving Charlton characters like the Blue Beetle, the Question **and** Captain Atom, I hope that Ditko was at least **asked** to participate in the revivals. Broderick's pencils are better than I've seen him do for some time. His figures are still a bit stiff and most of the cast's faces seem locked in perpetual grimaces, but then, this **was** a pretty tense issue. Smith's inks serve the pencils quite nicely, lending certain scenes an almost Barry Windsor-Smith quality.

This book has its plusses and minuses, but all-in-all, it will pay to keep an ion **Captain Atom** (old chemistry class joke).

—Jeff Kapalka



Fit For Birds

A more inept piece of illiterate diatribe has yet to be published, at least in this decade. Graphically speaking, **Web of Spider-Man #**25 was equally as inane.

Larry Leiber, sibling of the founding father of Marvel Comics, has proven that his style of writing and illustration just doesn't make it in the 1980's. Only somewhat adequate even in the '60s, Leiber should gracefully bow into retirement before he embarrasses Marvel further.

An obvious filler (I find it difficult to believe that anyone actually sat down and discussed this with Leiber), the story centers around an alien race trying to recover the ultimate cosmic weapon, the **cosmultigizer** (Leiber must have put his creative genius in overdrive to think up that one!). It temporarily falls into the hands of a petty thief and is recovered by Spider-Man who accidentally stumbles upon its secret "power"; the weapon is an **energizer** that increases other weapons fire-power a hundredfold. The mind boggles.

Peter Parker is wisked away to witness an imaginary battle that "will happen. . . unless. . . I stop it!" Given the enormity of the situation, in a brilliantly laid plan to foil this cosmic cataclysm, Spider-Man attempts to turn over the cosmultigizer to the N.Y.P.D. who end up making fun of him and send him to a cop that's into that "UFO stuff."

Meanwhile, Xanja, an amphibious-looking alien (who bears a striking

resemblance to Triton of the Inhumans), takes over the body of the petty thief who originally found the dastardly device, learns of Spidey's involvement and attempts to retrieve it over his dead body.

Spider-Man is saved by Vaalu, a time-traveller who, we come to find out, has been on Earth for the past 20 years posing as a policeman (that just happens to be the policeman that the ridiculing cops sent SM to see), awaiting the arrival of Xanja and the cosmultigizer so that he can put an end to the conquest and tyranny of Xanja's race. Of course, Spidey saves the good alien and receives a full explanation of what exactly happened. It's too bad we didn't receive an explanation as to WHY this was published.

With dialogue like, "Something—some force—is pulling me into that cosmic battle. I can't hold back! I'm in the grip of a power beyond all imagination!" by Spider-Man and "It matters not which Earthling has stolen the cosmultigizer! I can locate the device telectropatically!" by the villain, Xanja, it's a wonder this story ever got off the editor's desk. Editor Jim Salicrup would do well to take a good look at the talented newcomers like Bart Sears (whose work can be seen in TSR's latest Marvel quest book, **Night of the Wolverine**) and leave trash like this where it belongs . . . lining the bottom of a bird cage.

—Bob Gray

Sunspot's Power

I really don't want to get into the habit of reviewing single issues of limited series, as their ultimate success or failure depends so much on the final issue. A good wind-up can sometimes save a weak mini-series, and a bad finale can trash a promising epic. Let's face it, would anybody be willing to fork over the Big Bucks for the signed and numbered **Dark Knight** if the last issue was a fill in issue by (fill in your least-favorite writer and artist team)? I think not.

But I'm going to make an exception for **Legends** #5, my favorite issue so far in this six-issue series. Sure, after all of the foofawraw over the "great philosophical debate" between Darkseid and the Phantom Stranger on the importance of heroes, **Legends** turns out to be only an upscale **Super Powers**, but so what? John Byrne pencils punch-em-ups as good as anyone these days, and Karl Kesel proves yet again that he's one of the best inkers in the business. And if John Ostrander's plot and Len Wein's dialogue have seemed strained in the previous issues, at least here, in the penultimate chapter, the heroes are finally getting up off of their duffs and **doing** something about that wimp, S. Gordon Godfrey.

As an aside, I don't mind telling you that I was getting just a little sick of Billy Batson whining for the past four issues. Of course, when your alter-ego is saddled with dialogue like, "I **still** can't believe I actually have the strength of **Hercules** in these hands!"

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maybe you have a right to whine. A little.

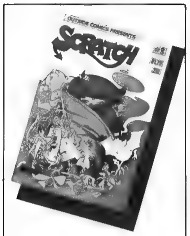
The highlight of this issue is the confrontation between Guy Gardner (my favorite Green Lantern) and the thinly disguised "Sunspot," as wicked a piece of comic-book mud slinging as I've seen this side of the **Comics Journal.** I loved it. For those of you who haven't read the issue, Sunspot is a meglomaniacal marauder who bears more than a passing resemblence to a certain big-city comics editor, as well as to his newest super-hero creation. With lines like "Don't you know **who** I am—**what** I am?! I wield the **Ultimate Power**—the power to create a **new universe,**" well, I don't think that they're being overly-subtle as to who the inspiration for the character is. In the most detailed batt e in an issue filled with battles, Gardner proceeds to beat the pemmican out of Sunspot. Hard **Real** hard.

Oh, it may **seem** mean spirited and vicious, but I'm sure that the entire episode was written and drawn in a spirit of good natured fun and lighthearted ribbing.

Right.

File **Legends** #5 under "guilty pleasures," and let's hope for a big finish.

—Jeff Kapalka



Treaded Scratch

While there are many extremely positive aspects of the current trend toward independently-published black and white comics, a major problem with this new movement is that too often these books and their creators—are not yet ready for the professional big time. This is the problem that plagues Outside Comics' **Scratch,** a new fantasy-humor title by cartoonist Charles Treadwell. Although much about Treadwell's work shows promise, he and his characters still lack the polish and depth needed to make the strip truly engaging and artistically successful

The premise of **Scratch** is decent enough, if not overwhelmingly original. Scratch is a little demon who winds up on Earth and intrudes into the life of an ordinary guy named Kidmund Krebbs. And sure, it's kind of a dumb name, but so is Cosmo Topper. Scratch travels with an entourage of two equally offbeat sidekicks, a Pepsi-addict bat called Wingz and Dr. Rex, the last living tyrannosaurus. The three of them take over Krebbs' apartment, where Scratch plots out his strategy against his arch-nemesis Dr. Sarcophakus, at least when he's not closing down the local bars

As I said, it's a premise that's at least serviceable for the kind of lighthearted fare it's intended to be, and what it lacks in originality could still be compensated for with the wit and style of the right cartoonist. But while Treadwell's writing and artwork both show potential, his current work is not strong enough to make Scratch anything special. Treadwell exhibits a natural ability for characterizations and dialogue, but his characters here are based more on schtick than per-

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sonality and their conversational exchanges often seem too forced and derivative to be truly funny. The main stories in #'s 2 & 3 are both too long and rambling, with Treadwell trying to include too many sub-plots and bits of business. His cartooning and story breakdowns both also indicate an innate talent that has yet to attain professional quality.

Treadwell's natural potential is most noticeable when compared to the work in the back-up stories found in **Scratch.** In addition to his main continued stories, both issues include a few short-shorts featuring the Scratch cast that are written and drawn by others. None of these stories amount to much more than lame one-joke fillers and the ones in #3 are made to look even worse by their extremely poor layout (two pages of art are reproduced sideways on one page of the book). Using shorter backups by other people isn't a bad idea by any means but to make the idea work the stories have to be better than these.

Scratch isn't a horrible comic, it's just not an especially good one--at least not yet. Treadwell seems to have his heart in most of the right places, though, and maybe someday he'll come up with a book that will be genuinely noteworthy. Judging from these two issues, however, I have to say that **Scratch** just isn't it.

Steve Monaco

A Cosmic Lad

Well, the first **Legends** cross over mini-series **(Cosmic Boy)** has just run its course, and frankly, I fail to see the attraction (sorry). It's not as if the four issue run was a complete waste of time (on the contrary, there are a lot of nice moments in here), but what writer Paul Levitz and artists Keith Giffen, Ernie Colon and Bob Smith have delivered is not a complete, self-contained story (which is not too much to ask of a mini-series), but an extended **Legion of Super-Heroes** sub plot. Let's take a look at what actually happens here.

The story really begins in the first couple of issues of **Legends**, as we see Cosmic Boy and Night Girl taking time off (so to speak) for a vacation in quaint old late-20th century earth. Unfortunately, they pop up at just the point in time when G. Gordon God Frey is inciting the general populace to rebel against the very concept of super heroes. In issue one of **Cosmic Boy,** Cos meets up with his old Legion crony Superboy (now an adult Superman) after an unsuccessful bout with the monster Brimstone. Something odd is going on here, though. Instead of greeting his old comrade-in-arms, the Man of Steel just says "That was a good try, kid--you have the makings of a real super-hero," and just flies off. Hmm . . .

Later, watching the evening news with Night Girl, Cosmic Boy slowly realizes that someone or something has rewritten the history of the earth, or at least **his** history of the earth. Mention is made of "the great Crisis," but it doesn't occur to either of them that there may be a connection. Cos spends the rest of the issue wondering what's going on and also finds time to avert an atomic disaster at a space shuttle launch and, of course, is blamed for causing the near-catastrophe.

Issue #2 finds our two heroes still in the dark, but anxious to find out what the deal is with this re-written history. After all, both Cos and Night Girl come from planets colonized from Earth at the time of the great space immigration. . an immigration that just might not happen if things keep going as they seem to be. So they pack up and head for the Houston Space Center to find out if the shuttle accident had anything to do with their present situation. There they exchange information with a scientist who "joined the corps because (he) thought (he'd) get a chance to walk on another planet (what with all that's happening. . well maybe his kid will get to go and save the center from a rampaging anti-nuke crowd. No clues are found, though, causing Cos to worry that if their ancestors don't leave earth, he and Night Girl may never be born! There is a Special Revealation for the reader, however. . . The scientist that they help at the Space Center is. . . Jason Krinnski!

Krinnski! Don't you get it? **Krinnski!**

Well, you might have gotten it if Levitz had clued you in that Cosmic Boy's real name is Rokk **Krinn.** (Even long-time **Legion** fans might have been able to use the hint. This is just plain careless. So it seems the immigration **will** occur. . . generation or so late. Whew!)

There's a Canadian postal regulation (or something) that puts a heavy tariff on mini-series that are less than four issues in length. This **might** account for issue #3's padding out of our heroes' return to the future. They try, hit a "time wall," wreck their time-bubble and then fix it with the help of Dr. Krinnski. And no, nobody connects his last name to Cos' here, either. They try again, fail again, and then harness Cos' magnetic powers to make a final time launch. This time they make it, but they overshoot their destination and wind up at the End of Time, and run into. .the Time Trapper.

And if you thought issue #3 was padded, issue #4 is one extended chase-and-fight, as the Trapper makes a deal that if Cosmic Boy and Night Girl can run his little obstacle course in the space of an hour, he'll let them return to their present. They do. They cheat. True to his word, the Trapper sends them back home, sealing off the Corridors of Time behind them. The end.

Well, not quite. It seems that the whole mini-series was an elaborate set-up by the Time Trapper for a confrontation with the Legion. The final words you see in the series are "To be continued--in the pages of **Legion of Super-Heroes** #36, as the greatest tangle of all time is unraveled before your eyes!" (And you thought you had seen the last of Krypto the Super Dog, didn't you?)

That's my biggest gripe about **Cosmic Boy.** There's no resolution to the story! There's not even a real victory for Cosmic Boy and Night Girl, just escape. One wonders if the Time Trapper had planned to let them go all along.

In any event, **Legion** followers should pick this series up, seeing as

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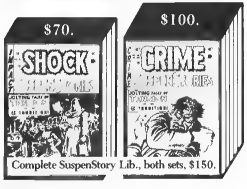

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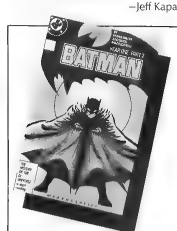
how it'll be an important part of the main book. The rest of you out there can take a look for yourselves . . . if you can spare the time.

—Jeff Kapalka



Batman: Year One

DC continues the revitalization of their major characters with Frank Miller's latest recreation of the Batman legend, "Batman: Year One."

The entire hype surrounding **Dark Knight** was justly deserved. But Miller's latest contribution to the legend is even more worthy of attention than its predecessor.

Indeed, Batman's origin couldn't be in better hands. Mazzucchelli's graphic representation is even superior to Miller's own. The pencils capture effectively the mood of the times, the **suggestion** of detail carrying the dynamics of the work better than the actual rendition of detail ever could.

Re-writing an origin of such an important character can be both dangerous and difficult. On one hand, the creative team must be careful not to stray too far from the original version in their retelling so as not to alienate the reader in his familiarity with the character. On the other hand, they must add new elements to the story to set it apart from the dozens of other versions already told. Miller and Mazzucchelli have managed not only to capture the original mood of the strip like no other writer/artist team ever has before, but successfully communicate the Batman's motivation and obsessions, while never losing touch with his humanity.

The series is filled with pathos and emotion, from the conflicts that Gordon runs into with the corrupt Gotham police department and politicians, to the near fatal errors Batman makes as he is learning his chosen avocation from beginning to end, these characters are as real as the reader. The story is so totally engrossing and original in its approach, that it's easy to lose touch with the fact that this was Batman's past, not his present.

The series deserves a more attractive and expensive format than the standard 75¢ comic version. Perhaps after the **Dark Knight** problems, DC decided to go with a more mainstream format that would offer the wildest exposure.

Aside of this one small criticism, 'Batman. Year One" is a genuine piece of graphic story-telling at its finest. If a person ever wanted to give a **Batman** comic a try, there couldn't be a better time than right now to do so. This is Batman at his best.

—Bob Gray

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Eisner Con't From Page 35

would make a fool of Spider-Man. It just never got anywhere. We had two lunches on it. As we discussed it, it became more and more impossible.

Frank Miller told me later that they asked him if he would be willing to do The Spirit. He looked at me and I shook my head and he shook his head, shrugged, laughed and walked away.

FOUR COLOR: You've influenced entire generations of creators. Who influenced your work?

EISNER: Comic artists who very early on influenced me include Segar of **Popeye**; Milton Caniff was a strong influence on me with his ability to develop complex plots and his draftsmanship; Harold Foster for sheer illustration. There were other artists that influenced me more more than comic artists did. Lyendecker influenced me tremendously. I still draw very much the way he does. The feathering I use in my shadows is still very much like Lyadecka's illustrations. Early N.C. Wyeths, who illustrated the books I read most, the Sabatini works and the Robert Louis Stevenson works.

I was also influenced by the pulp illustrators People like Matt Clark, who was a very strong illustrator. All his characters looked like Clint Eastwood at the time, that brush work intrigued me. Low, the political cartoonist, influenced some of my work. No one artist really, fully influences you. There is a whole battery of them that make little contributions to the way you think.

FOUR COLOR: How about in writing?

EISNER: My writing was influenced almost universally by short story writers. O Henry, Ambrose Bierce and DeMupassant. I learned the craft of short story writing from them by just reading them and learning how they fabricated stories.

FOUR COLOR: You've mentioned several times that you'd like to see the comics medium move forward. Would you elaborate?

EISNER: I'd like to see it head where it's going now. I think comics are a literary form. I'd like to see it move ahead toward a responsibility of content. I think much that is wrong with comics today is the fault of the people producing it. Publishers can only publish what writers and artists give them. A publisher's function is to try to determine the desires of the audience and try to give it to them.

Comic book artists are trying to anticipate the wants and the needs of the readers in order to produce something that will sell lots of copies.

I don't think the responsibility is entirely with the people who publish the comics. They are very low on the responsibility level. The responsibility is with the writer and the artist who should be producing material of greater worth. Comics will, and are beginning to do so now, gradually develop in sophistication so they will be able to deal with serious themes.

By adult themes I don't mean "titilating sex," which has always been the word for adult subjects. I mean stories having to do with human experience and feelings. This requires, of course, an audience that has similar life experience. I know when I write, I am writing for an audience I'm hoping has a similar life experience to mine. Hopefully I'm dealing with subject matter that is meaningful.

I don't think the comic medium is there yet. I think we are still beginning to move in that direction. A number of things have happened recently that are really very, very promising. The emergence of Art Spiegelman's **Maus** and the reception that it received, more than what he wrote, is a strong indication.

People who normally regard themselves as the self-appointed guardians of our culture are beginning to review this material seriously. I think that the art medium, the drawing and the craftsmanship, will begin to fashion itself to suit this new medium.

"I must satisfy my lifetime need which is to take this medium where I think it should go and to do better things than I've done before."

Right now, 90 percent of the comic books published in this country are devoted to what I call a "visual trip." A lot of the books that are produced today look like they were produced by a special effects man. Their main object is a minimum of story and a maximum of visual excitement. Well, I can understand it because it sells books but in order to write seriously or deal with a subject like man's relationship with God, you can't have razzle-dazzle pages of two mutants trashing each other. You must be able to let your artwork be subordinated sometimes to the story, which is the way I work.

I start with the idea and let the artwork deal with the idea, rather than idea dealing with the artwork.

A great deal of trash is being turned out today and I worry about that. I noticed recently in the trade press there has been a discussion going on about the monster of censorship. I am obviously totally opposed to censorship but I think that probably the freedom, even literary freedom, is very often abused. To quote that old saw, about yelling fire in a crowded theater under the name of free speech, is what's happening.

A lot of people are turning out utter trash for the purpose of selling comics. In that process, they are destroying the credibility of the medium. Now you can't ask them to stop, because they won't stop. You can only sit around and wring your hands or hope there are enough people around like me or Art Spiegleman who regard this medium as their life work and feel a sense of responsibility.

FOUR COLOR: What are you up to today?

EISNER: I just completed a 48 page novella called **The Dreamer**. I've been doing novellas because a graphic novel of 160 pages takes me about a year and a half to do. As I told you earlier, I'm always struggling with more ideas than I have time to produce.

I'm working on one now that I hope I'll be able to complete by next year, having to do with the city again. It discusses the life of inanimate objects in the city, that always intrigues me. Tentatively it's called, **The Building**. What happens to a building after it is torn down? What's left?

The Dreamer is the story of the early comics. It is the story that tries to explain what goes on in a young cartoonist trying to start out in the comic business. As a matter of fact, it's semi-autobiographical, semi-fiction and semi-true. It is a story very much like one would write about the beginnings of the motion picture business.

It takes place in a studio and really hinges around a premise: What is it that motivates ambitious, young artists? Somewhere inside there is a belief in a destiny. **The Dreamer** really has to do with the self-perception of destiny.

I did it initially as a 16 page story and Denis Kitchen [publisher of The Kitchen Sink Press] read it and thought it was good enough to expand. I expanded it into a 48 page book.

FOUR COLOR: Five hundred years from now, how would you like to be remembered?

EISNER: I'd like to be remembered. Period. Taken seriously as someone who helped advance the medium. Who produced good literature within the frame of this medium. That's all I can ask for. I would say that's probably what I'm working towards. That's what I devoted the last 12 years to.

Someone once accused me that one of my problems is that I like to be taken seriously. I guess it's true.

David Caruba, Joe Cicala, Jeff Kapalka, Will Murray and Brian Schlesinger contributed to this interivew.

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By Barry Dutter

on the racks

"I wish I had a phaser to zap all these people ahead of us in line."

This was a comment made by a very strange woman who had just cut in front of us. I was with my friend Bill. We were in line at the November 31 Creation Convention in New York City.

We had been waiting to get in to the con for about an hour and really didn't feel like dealing with a rabid **Star Trek** fan. So we tried to ignore her.

I remarked to Bill that I hadn't been impressed with **Star Trek IV**. I made my comment quietly, hoping that Mrs. Spock wouldn't hear me. Unfortunately, she did.

She then proceeded to launch into this long tirade about the pros and cons of **Star Trek IV**. At no point did she attempt to ask our opinions. She wasn't talking to us, she was talking **at** us. One thing about comic conventions, they tend to attract their share of oddballs.

A comic convention is the only event I can think of where the people who show up late are actually better off than those who are there at the start. There really are no advantages to showing up at the beginning of a con. If you arrive early, you have to wait in line for an hour or more. My advice to con-goers is to show up after the con has been open for an hour or so. That way, you'll avoid lines entirely.

The admission price to the con was $15. The price seemed a bit steep, considering Creation used to put on the same show a few years ago for only half the amount. I can understand it costs them a lot of money to put on a show like this, but I wish it didn't have to cost us so much to attend it. What with the price of admission to the show, transportation and lunch, the day can be very expensive — and that's not counting what you spend while at the convention.

The first sight that greeted our eyes upon entering the show was the dealers room, loaded with comics, Japanese toys, books, Star Trek memorabilia, posters, etc. Although the room had plenty to offer, it did seem a lot smaller than in previous years. I heard more than one con-goer comment on "the incredible shrinking dealers room."

Bill and I shopped around for a while and got some pretty good deals. One good thing about conventions, the dealers are always willing to haggle. I bought a copy of **The Defenders #1** priced at $9 for only $6 and Bill picked up an **Escape From The Planet of the Apes** movie poster for $10 instead of the $20 it was priced at.

The day had a full schedule of events divided up between two auditoriums. Creation Conventions used to have film rooms with movies, cartoons and shorts showing continuously, but sadly, that was missing from this show. There were films shown, but there was only one room set aside exclusively for that purpose.

The first event we attended was an auction, where there were plenty of bargains to be found. Bill and I were amused by the kid sitting next to us, who bought half the stuff that was up for bid with no regard for how much he was spending. He wound up coming home with a 12 inch Godzilla figure, a Robotech record, a Dr. Who video tape and more. Every time the kid walked up on stage to pick up his purchase, he would try to justify to us why he bought what he did.

One time, after buying Mr. Peabody, Gumby and Pokey dolls, he walked past us on his way to the stage commenting, "I'm getting my Christmas shopping done early this year."

The next event was a showing of the **Star Trek** blooper reel. Some of these are very funny, many were not. Most bloopers, **Star Trek** or otherwise, seem to consist of actors laughing instead of saying their lines and this gets tiresome after a while. The crowd got a big kick out of it, though.

Another event that got a good turnout was the **Star Trek Four** discussion, in which the audience got to sound off on the film. The general consensus seemed to be that the makers of the film appealed to a mass audience, but in doing so, alienated the loyal **Trek** audience. But it was hard to tell what people's reactions really were since the emcee dominated the debate. I would have liked to have heard more about how the audience felt instead of the emcee hogging the show.

The low-point of the debate came when two **Star Trek** fanatics, both wearing Spock-ears, got in an argument over what class of ship the new Enterprise should be. They both began quoting from their Starfleet Technical Manuals, and it got a little embarrassing. When two adults start arguing about the serial numbers on a spaceship, then you know they've gone too far. All of this goes to show that it's not a good idea to be a fanatic about **anything** — comics, Star Trek, cars, music, sports, whatever.

Next up was a guest-speaker, June Foray, who did the voice of Rocky on the old **Rocky and Bullwinkle** show and still supplies voices for many animated characters today. My moment of glory came when I stood up and said, in my Bullwinkle voice,

"Rocky, watch me pull a rabbit out of my hat." Miss Foray, as Rocky, responded, "Again! But that trick never works!"

The last guest we saw was Majel Barrett-Roddenberry, **Star Trek's** Nurse Christine Chapel. Barrett, like Foray before her, proved to be full of stories about the people she used to work with and the great times they used to have. Both ladies were more than willing to answer questions from the audience, even if their answers were a tad long-winded at times.

I found it odd that none of the other actors from **Star Trek** were on hand to promote the new film on its opening weekend. Personally, I would rather have seen a more prominent member of the Trek cast, such as George Takei or DeForest Kelly.

Other events held that day were monster make-up demonstrations by Tom Savini and Arnold Garguilo, a panel of **Spider-Man** writers and artists, showings of **Robotech** and **Dr. Who** episodes and an appearance by Jonathan Harris, Dr. Smith from **Lost In Space**.

After a full day of bargain-hunting in the dealers room and attending events, Bill and I were ready to leave. Overall, we found the con to be well-attended and well-organized, except for the area where we had to wait in line before the con, that was crowded and inconvenient. Also, though "close to 100 guests" had been advertised, there were really only about 30 over the three days of the convention.

In the future, I would recommend that the Creation people bring back the all-day film room, always a popular attraction. Also, I'd like to see the return of bigger dealers rooms like they had in the good old days.

As for people planning to attend conventions, my advice is as follows: 1) Don't show up early. Wait until the con has been open for at least a half hour or so. You won't miss anything and you'll bypass the lines altogether. 2) Shop around before you buy anything. Whatever you want, you can always find it cheaper. 3) Don't ever pay the price the dealer is asking. You can almost always talk them down. And finally (this is perhaps the most important one of all), leave your phaser at home.

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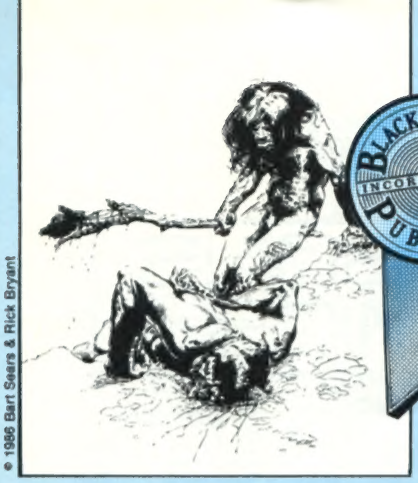

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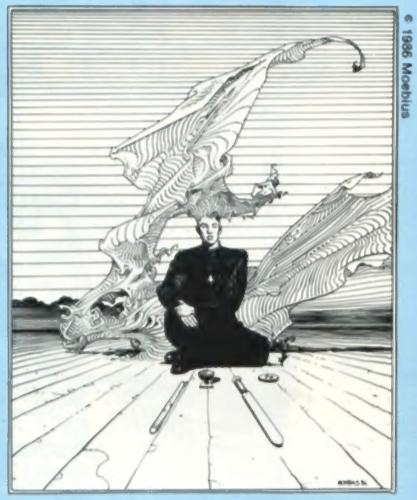

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